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THE

MELVILLES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"JOHN DRAYTON."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE MELVILLES.

CHAPTER I.

What is John Aikman doing?

At this present moment rubbing his forehead with energy, while he blushes the most desperate of blushes—hanging over a writing-table, over a sheet of paper where stand in single file a long array of numerals, and with pen in hand, "doing a sum" in simple addition which, seems to be an almost impossible feat in his present state of mind.

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There are two single files upon the paper, one of figures, another of hieroglyphical capital letters corresponding to the figures. The first of these is H.— with a bold pen, and in exceeding haste John enlarges this, and makes it House-rent.

House-rent! The blush deepens, and with a visible start, John contemplates this open betrayal of his secret thoughts. He feels almost as he reads the word, as if some stranger had looked in upon him, and discovered his dreamings, and laughed. To carry out the analogy, he laughs himself; not loudly, but with an extreme sense of the ludicrous—and immediately returns to his employment.

S.— what is that?—never mind—within the S., John beholds two neat maid-servants. B. B. G.— what are these? My good friend, it does not concern you,—

enough that the sums, which rank with them, come to a very satisfactory total—and John rubs his hands, and smiles.

But now, here is a tremendous formidable letter. F.—what is F.? Be not curious, young gentleman. Some time or other, when you are thinking of being "settled," you will understand what F. means; alas! all the pangs involved in it—all the tribulations of choice—all the sorer tribulations of those days, when the vendor of F. has a large bill to pay, and greatly desires the amount of his little account. For you will observe the depreciatory pettiness, which the man puts upon you, and the goods and chattels you have gathered. A *little* account;—perhaps your very heart's blood is in it—your health, your strength, your most strenuous labour—it would be some consolation if he thought

it great. No, you are a small man, understand. You did not give by any means so large an order as your neighbour in the great house—and so yours is only a *little* account.

And this F. puzzles John Aikman. Seriously interested, he ceases to blush, ceases to laugh at himself. Alas! those unattainable tables and chairs, those beautiful sofas and book-cases—how to get them, when one has only an income, and no great superfluity in that; and John rubs his forehead again, but now with no blush, for here is a difficulty, and his shyness flies before it.

So there follow, hard as the pen can write them, a number of other numerals, not now arranged in single file, but dotted down in heaps with eager rapidity. Bye and bye, a satisfactory solution seems to be

attained at—for again the pen is dipped in the ink, and opposite the F. stands an important sum, bulging out, by reason of its greater magnitude, from the single file—and John sees his way; the tables and chairs are no longer unattainable.

Straightway he falls into a reverie, hanging over the paper still, pen in hand; for you perceive there is not much to do to-day in the office. This business, which John's mind is at present about, is not a very exalted one; something more in the housemaid's way than in the master's, we are constrained to confess. He has just had the carpet neatly fitted to the floor of this imaginary parlour, and now he is arranging his furniture, to enjoy it bye and bye.

Let it stand at the window, this pretty work-table—John's thoughts touch it so

delicately that you see, it must be a fine one; and so it is, with such fanciful carved work about it, as never existed, except in dreams. Let it stand there at the window, where the sun will come in upon it pleasantly, and light the worker who shall use it. Beside the work-table put this chair—place it half within the warm, sheltering drapery of the curtains, John; for this is a bow-window, large and lightsome, and its wide recess is like a lady's bower. If any one uses this seat, who has red hair, how the light will gleam upon it through those half-opened blinds; and John, sitting within the shade, already sees it gleam.

The sofa must be behind, for even in this room there will sometimes be winter—winter, the kindliest season,—and chairs which one can draw to the fireside, and

a mirror over the mantel-piece, in which there may be pictures made of any passing figure.

When it is winter, the fire will reflect itself in those same locks of ruddy brown, and the mirror, flashing into the happy light, will catch the reflection, and image forth again every shade of that bright hair. The curtains shall be drawn, the hearth shall be radiant, and sitting in this great chair, John, "the master," as they shall call him in the kitchen, will watch some one moving to and fro, catch the passing picture in the mirror, hear the light foot softly moving on the carpet; and there comes a tear into his eye, good fellow—it is all so beautiful.

To awake from this, and to find one's-self in an office—a prosaic office with a

bit of matting under one's feet, a writing-table at one's hand, a map of Liverpool on the wall, and the invariable coal-scuttle, more dusty than usual, because not at present in use, withdrawn to a corner—was very disenchanting. But that is false doctrine, and there rather floated a greater magic over the sacred room, which John has been arranging, from its contrast with this. And here the daily bread shall be laboured for; here, by his own work, he shall achieve the independent home; a certain charm comes upon the office, and, with a sudden impulse of industry, John snatches up his pen and begins to write.

He cannot go to Mrs. Melville's to-night; cannot, though the parlour retains much attraction to him, even though the red hair be away; for to-night John is going

to a great house to a great dinner, and has in the first place to go through a distressing toilet, which makes him supremely uncomfortable, and diminishes his good looks. He has not a great deal to spare he is conscious, but he is not half so solicitous about his appearance to-night as he was last Saturday, when he climbed the little hill at Everton to propose a walk, for which the girls were too busy. Poor John! on Saturday nobody noticed his toilet—it is possible some one will to-night.

For John Aikman's family and connexions were good, wealthy, respectable, and though he came to Liverpool only as a junior clerk, and had now begun business, as he himself said, "in a small way," he had not been able to divest himself of the advantages of his position. His "good

connexions" clung to him like thistle-down, and people invited him to dinner with a hospitality, for which John thanked them very little. With capital enough to give him a fair start, with a downright weight and force of character, which being obvious, people could perceive, and with friends who could favour him "in the way of business," John had in him "the makings" of a great merchant. It was very true, that no one gave him credit for those shadings of tenderness and delicacy, which rounded the rudeness of his character into a form very loveable; but no one was so unconscious of these as himself was.

"I'm a rough fellow, but there's no harm in me"—he had meant to say as much even to Isabella Melville; but in his heart, of himself, he believed no more.

But now his neckcloth is tied—John's patience had very nearly given way before the feat was accomplished—and he stands in a full drawing-room, out of the way and silent, nobody caring much for him, and himself caring for nobody present.

The dinner wears on slowly; there is not much conversation. Ah, affliction of afflictions, where people must talk, and where nobody has anything to say; but by degrees it passes, and the ladies at last take their departure—an immense relief to both parties, for now it becomes possible to accomplish a little talk.

And John Aikman is becoming interested in a conversation, which has gradually aroused him from sundry meditations. It has begun about the fever, and John

is not without sundry bits of information which, he says with a blush, he has picked up, he cannot tell how; the truth is, he picked them up in the court under his windows, which has extracted many a coin from John's purse—but he would not betray himself for the world.

A professional-looking person, who came in late, and who is called Doctor, sits opposite John. Near him is Hugh Melville's employer, Mr. Renshaw. The Doctor has been talking at some length about the fever.

"But you, I suppose, have known little of it personally, Doctor?" said Mr. Renshaw.

"Not much, I confess; it is in quite a different branch of the profession, that I am principally employed," was the answer; "but I have had a kind of ad-

venture in connection with this fever, which should not want recording. A young man —a fine fellow—came to me one day in a sad state of anxiety, about a patient he had been attending. He was not a thoroughly educated man—a student only, who had been compelled to relinquish his studies, and was then in some office—I forget where, though he told me."

"Was it Hugh Melville? he is in Mr. Renshaw's office!" exclaimed John, with breathless interest.

"Do you know him? Yes, his name was Melville. I like to see a man ask a favour bravely and ingenuously—it always strikes me as a sign of a generous disposition. He asked me to go and see his patient, and to tell him if his prescriptions were correct. I did so, and

I have seen him once or twice since; he has already become quite experienced in the fever, and treats it admirably. That is a young man now whom I grudge to see lost in an office. He has evidently a vocation for something higher."

With his face crimsoned with pleasure and excitement, his elbows unconsciously leaning on the table, and his head bent forward between his hands, John Aikman, with a thrill of generous delight, followed the slight gestures of the speaker.

"It is this then which makes Hugh late"—unawares he pronounced the words aloud.

"You seem greatly interested, Mr. Aikman," said Mr. Renshaw, coldly.

John Aikman had little reverence for dignities; and, to tell the truth, his *brusque* manner of addressing them, con-

siderably added to his other claims on their notice; for no poor man—no dependent would have ventured to speak so boldly.

"I should be;" said John, "for Hugh, I am glad to say, is my—" he was about to add *dearest* friend; but the secret unknown delicacy of heart he had, would not suffer him to let the sun in on his affection; so he blushed and cast about for another word—"is my—is a friend any one may be proud of," continued John; "he has been keeping this secret—perhaps lest his friends should be alarmed; but we might have known it was something worthy of him."

"A fine fellow, I am sure," said the Doctor. "Now there is a good deed for some of you millionaires; send this fine young man to College, and let him complete

his education. He will be a credit to his patron I am convinced, if he gets one; and if I could spare enough for such a purpose, he should not want one long."

"Oh, if it is Melville you mean, Doctor, he has a rich uncle," said Mr. Renshaw, "and no doubt there must be some good and sufficient reason, or Mr. Greenlees would not have placed his nephew with me."

"Perhaps because he thought a merchant's the more money-making craft," said the Doctor, "very probably—the young man did not himself prefer it, I am very sure."

"The reason *was* very good and sufficient," said John Aikman, warmly; "it was because my friend Hugh had a family depending on him, which his uncle did not feel himself called upon to support—other-

wise clerks are not great money-makers, Doctor; with a hundred a-year it is somewhat difficult to save money."

"My dear Sir," I began with fifteen shillings a week," said a round-about man—good-humoured, rich and fat, "and I can tell down coin for coin now with any man on 'Change."

"It requires a peculiar genius," said John, with a smile. "Hugh may perhaps be a great doctor some day; but that he will ever be very rich, I doubt."

"Well, if he is lost among you—if he does not turn out a good doctor, at least whether he ever be a great one—I wash my hands of the blame," said the Doctor; "but one thing I am sure of, he is a fine fellow, a warm-hearted, clear-headed young man, who would do honour to any one who befriended him; and this is a case for

patronage, I think, though in general I admire patronage as little as any man."

"Ah, he has a rich uncle!" said Mr. Renshaw.

It was perfectly satisfactory. There must be some reason why the rich uncle did not help, and in his secret heart every man there magnified the immaculate Nabob, and put an involuntary stigma on poor Hugh.

But John Aikman walked home, his heart beating high with generous exultation, and regretting only, that it was too late now to go at once to Mrs. Melville to relieve the fears he had guessed, and to make glad the love which needed no guessing. He was so glad himself, that he almost forgot his calculations, though bye and bye, they slid in again, and threw a yet brighter radiance over all.

CHAPTER II.

But while John Aikman, joyous in his power to comfort her, does his business lightsomely in this fair August forenoon, it is otherwise with the widow. Left alone through all these long days, without even the conversation, slight though that often was, of Esther and Isabella, to divert her thoughts, she has brooded continually on this mystery, which darkens the conduct of her son. Where he goes—what he is doing.

If he has indeed bound himself to some one, whom he fears to present to his mother; or if it is regard for his mother's feelings, which alone prevents him, from bringing home a wife to take her place. Poor Mrs. Melville! there is no shape, in which her fancy does not bring this one great absorbing thought before her—no point of view from which she does not look at it; sometimes with involuntary anger and those usual expressions, "artful," "designing," "entanglement," with which the friends of young men who marry below their own station, are so apt to avenge themselves upon the wife; sometimes with sad, unspeakable relentings, thinking that Hugh's choice must become dear to *her*—that she must learn to cherish, to help, to improve this unknown for Hugh's sake. As she sits at her needle, all day long, these thoughts

never leave her, and they are sorrowful thoughts.

It is the drowsy afternoon—a hot, languid, oppressive time; and Jane has been sent out on some household errand. The window is open, and there is scarcely a breath of air to bring to Mrs. Melville the odour of the mignonette, which, unlike her spring primroses, has no associations to the widow's mind. Always working, she sits by the window as usual; always thinking, her mind as usual dwells upon Hugh; and on the face so like his, the fresh hopeful mother's face, speaking a heart which cannot grow old, there is a paleness and contraction painful to see. You would think some evil thing had put its gripe upon the forehead, and compressed it. So it has, indeed; for there is surely no evil angel that has power to torture

like the sleepless gnawing of anxiety—and this was busy at her heart.

While she sat thus, some one knocked at the door. Mrs. Melville rose and opened it. On the steps stood the vivacious odd-looking woman, whom Hugh had seen the night before. She was not the most reputable person in the world, so far as appearance went. Under an old straw bonnet, which had undergone all manner of vicissitudes, and tasted even the mud of the causeway in its time, appeared her black elf-locks, and the straggling borders of a muslin cap, once white, but no longer so, while round her shoulders she wore, as all such people wear, a peculiar kind of faded shawl. What the class or species of this shawl is, we cannot tell. It is a thing which you never see—which we believe nobody ever saw—new; but when a

woman comes to you with a begging-letter, or when you find a half grown girl despatched on any important errand, this invariable shawl is the principal part of the costume. Over the whole of it meanders an imbecile intricacy of pattern, and it never has been of any colour, but the colour of poverty and entire *fadedness*. Now and then, it is visible among the respectable poor, but to every vagrant family it is an heir-loom.

The printed cotton gown, once of bright enough colours, now of no colour at all, corresponds very well with the rest of the costume, and the face, though it is very vivacious, is by no means clean. Not quite the sort of person whom mothers desire to see inquiring for their sons, and Mrs. Melville started in dismay as the woman addressed her.

"Please, is the young master in?"

"My son is not at home," said the widow drawing herself up with unconscious stateliness.

"Eh, that's a bad job! but he's to come directly to No. 5 in our court—here's the direction—as soon as ever he can come; for the young woman's took very bad there."

Mrs. Melville received the paper passively, struck dumb by terror, anxiety, and anguish. Very willing would the woman have been to linger and tell her all the story; but not knowing what she was about, only grasping the bit of dirty paper in her hand, and making a great physical effort to support herself, Mrs. Melville without another word, closed the door.

"Well, this is a high madam—not a bit like the young gentleman," said the mes-

senger; "but maybe she's afeard of the fever, poor thing; it's not every one as has a bold heart like me."

Poor Mrs. Melville! just now she has not a bold heart—sinking down upon the sofa, she puts her hand to her side and gasps for breath. Alas! not imprudence only—not vague dissipation — but is there vice here, and is Hugh the sinner? She dares not ask —she dares not answer the question—only an unexpressed certainty bears down upon her; it must be so.

Ah, those long, long, drowsy summer hours! in imagination the mother sees Isabella among the noble Perthshire trees—upon the free banks of her native Tay—and is glad, she is not here—glad, that it will be possible to bear the worst—perhaps to bear it all alone.

The paper is very dirty, and the address is

written in a miserable hand. At first, as she sits looking at it, her intention is to keep it till Hugh returns, and then to seek from him an explanation; but Hugh may not return till the night is far spent, and this suspense is intolerable. It is nearly five o'clock now—in a very short time he should leave his office. Mrs. Melville rises nervously and hurries up-stairs, to prepare herself for going out.

And with unconscious pride she arranges her dress; and puts on the best she has. If Hugh has degraded himself thus, it becomes her to do what in her lies to uphold so much character, so much humble dignity, as remains to them. But Mrs. Melville's widow's veil has never before hung over a countenance so haggard—for this is by far the hardest of her many trials.

And as she hurries down the hill and

towards the river, she thinks with self-reproach, how often she herself has condemned the guilty—condemned them with shrinking and abhorrence—set them aside out of the range of her sympathies. And the mother remembers that many a head as richly blessed with hopes as Hugh's, has gone down disgracefully, into those uttermost abysses of misery and wretchedness worse than death, from the brink of which it may yet be possible to save *her* son. There comes into her heart a yearning of universal pity—an unexpressed prayer for all who are thus sinning—for all who mourn for sin. But her thoughts never come to a distinct end—they are all broken, incoherent, all interspersed with those agonized entreaties for Hugh, which spring to her lips unawares, even when some other thought is in her mind.

"Help a distressed woman, lady," said a

beggar in the street; the words chime strangely in with the widow's melancholy fancies. A distressed woman! if every distressed woman who passes you, poor seeker of charity, testified her sisterhood by the poorest mite, how rich you should be overnight. Many a one goes smiling by—many a one in grave composure hears your voice, as though she heard it not, who is more a distressed woman than you are—and there are some whose hearts are bursting with that self-same cry.

But Mrs. Melville cannot pass: humbly she puts a coin into the beggar's hand, and with the words echoing in her ears, goes on, herself a woman most distressed—wondering within herself, if there is any sorrow like unto this sorrow, any affliction so great as her own.

This now is the street, to which she has

been directed. At the end, you can see the high dock-wall, and some scantily sprinkled masts—for they are mostly steam-vessels, which lie down yonder, and the street is full of little eating-houses, and humble lodgings in front; while behind, in the courts, the population is largely mixed with porters, and cabmen, and proprietors of donkey-carts, very learned in the move-ments of Scotch and Irish steamers, and turning out in great force to waylay the hapless passengers of these, at every arrival.

A few private dwelling-houses—in one of which Hugh Melville saw the young police-man—break the line of petty shops here and there; but almost every cellar has withered greens, or stale fish, or some other such article of traffic, displayed at the head of its little stair, and the whole street swarms with life.

Tribes of children, who come in the morning one cannot discover whence, and at night disappear, it is impossible to tell where. Young lounging lads with badges on their arms. Irish importations newly landed; some of them looking innocent, fresh, and unsophisticated; and some with the savage, contracted face, which so often belongs to the Milesian blood. The street overflows with human creatures—overflows with noise, with sin, with everything impure, which human creatures bring in their train; and solemnly slanting over the roofs, as though the atmosphere was too dense to suffer its influence, except in a certain golden reflection, which it cannot choose but cast out of its wealth even here, the sunshine glides away into the West, gleaming on the beautiful river, whose uses, beneficent as they are, have collected so much evil on its banks.

Mrs. Melville has not to descend the street far; the court, to which she is bound, is nearly at the top, but just as she is bracing herself to cross from where she stands and enter it, some one comes quickly down the street, and goes in before her. It is only half-past five—he never came home so soon; but with a pang at her heart she sees it is Hugh.

And now the widow draws her shawl round her, and putting back her veil, prepares to follow him; though, her limbs are so feeble, she can scarcely cross the street.

Poor Irish Dennis is going on favourably, and Hugh has just glanced in to see him, and to hear his wife's grateful report; but "there's a young woman took very bad at No. 5." Mary Kelly, with the interest which these very poor, and not very virtuous

neighbours take in each other, dispatches the doctor with all imaginable speed.

Mrs. Melville has entered the court with a trembling, uncertain step. Children pause in their sports and gather about her—for a lady is a rare sight here, though charitable ladies come now and then. But the charitable ladies are known to the children; this is a stranger, and they peer into her face, and pull her skirts with bold mischief—what is she doing here?

The door of No. 5 stands open. Within, the little poor kitchen looks rather cleaner than its neighbours, and the narrow stair, which ascends to the one other room above, has been lately scrubbed, and looks quite white, comparatively speaking. An elderly, hard-featured Irishwoman, is going about her household matters between the table and the fire-place. To be an Irish-

woman there is very little of the usual squalor about this person. She looks "daïcent" and evidently understands that she does so.

"Have you a daughter? is there any one ill here?" asked Mrs. Melville.

"Sure it's the lodger, poor cratur," said the housewife; "come in, your honour, and I'll tell you all about it. It's you that's the good lady coming and helping the young doctor, I'll go bail. Eh! that's the jewel of a gentleman! He's with her now."

A sudden revelation, so grand and joyful, that it dazzled her, and made her stagger with very weakness, flashed upon Mrs. Melville's mind. She leaned upon the chair the woman offered her, and looked round dubiously, feeling as if she dreamed.

"Don't be afeard—the fever, my lady's, been in the court this ten days, and I've

not had a bad turn myself, though I'm living next door. Sure it's only faintish or a weakness at the heart you've got—and a drink of water is the best cure."

Mrs. Melville took the water gratefully, and was revived.

"And the young woman—is it the fever?" she asked faintly.

"It's a poor girl, your honour, come out of County Down—a daicent cratur, better needn't be. She came to take service, but never a one offered; so she's done a day's wash, or gone out to char—sure anything she could lay her hand to, for a bit of bread—and if she lives to be well, a better girl, for the lights she has, the cratur, isn't in all England, nor a more deserving for charity—if that's what your honour means."

Mechanically Mrs. Melville took out her

purse; no sum was too great to pay for this discovery.

"Sure, my lady, you're some friend to the young doctor," said the Irishwoman, curtseying; "here's he been at Dennis Kelly in the court, and as many more as I'd count on my ten fingers, all for love's sake, and ne'er a word of money in his mouth. Ah, your honour, that's the kind of quality we want about here, and in Ireland too for that matter—the warm heart and the full hand; and the Holy Virgin and the Holy Saints carry ye up to Heaven, my lady, and make your bed there. Sure, isn't it done already? I'll put this past in the cupboard for the cratur's physic; but here's the young doctor coming down stairs."

"Mother!" exclaimed Hugh, pausing in the middle of the stair, as his eye fell on

his mother's agitated face. He became much agitated himself. The surprise, after so much excitement, had an actual physical effect upon him.

"I was nervous and alone, Hugh—I came to meet you," faltered Mrs. Melville.

Hugh said nothing more, but turning to the Irishwoman, gave her a prescription, and directed her where to send for the medicine, recommending, however, that the friendless patient up-stairs should be removed to the fever hospital.

"I daren't go nigh her myself," said the housewife, lowering her tone. "Sure it isn't every one, doctor, can stand being nigh the sickness; your honour's mother was faintish like herself, just coming over the door; but there's that Widow Johnson, isn't a bit afeard. I'm not to call afeard myself, but there's the man's mate and all his

bothers that I've got to mind. Do you think the cratur ever will be well again, doctor?"

"Yes," said Hugh, shortly, "if she goes to the hospital and is taken care of, I think she will."

"Well, I wouldn't be again it," said the woman. "Lady, dear, I'll save up the charity, and it'll be something for her, when she gets well, or if she doesn't get well, sure it would be a great comfort to the poor mother at home, and you'd never miss it, my lady."

"Do with it what you please, my good woman," said Mrs. Melville. "Are you waiting for me, Hugh? I am ready."

"Mother! mother!" said Hugh reproachfully, as they emerged into the street, after several interruptions from women in the court, who had already become acquainted

with him, and who, knowing him to be a doctor who gave advice "for nothing," were quite anxious to consult him about teething, and a hundred other little maladies of childhood, which Hugh did not understand. "Could you not trust me?"

"Hugh, I was very anxious; I did trust you always when I thought coolly of it—but it was impossible to do that at all times, Hugh; and I was very anxious—very anxious. I thought I should have broken my heart to-day, when that woman came to me and asked for my son."

"Poor Mrs Johnson, she did not know," said Hugh, with a smile; "she thought you were very 'high,' mother. That wild woman has a heart in her; you should have seen her with the poor girl yonder."

"When did you begin this, Hugh? how

many patients have you had?" asked Mrs. Melville.

With a smile Hugh counted them upon his fingers.

"I began with Jane's aunt, mother, and since that time I have had extensive practice for a beginner. She died, poor Annie! but, mother, I thank God; He has made me the means of saving some."

CHAPTER III.

PERHAPS it is sometimes well to have such an experience of undeserved blame and uncaused anxiety as this of Mrs. Melville's. The hearts of the mother and the son overflowed to each other, as they went home together so happily and confidentially, each restored to their old familiar knowledge of all the other's thoughts. It was no longer the mother's natural, unshaken, unreasoning confidence in her boy. It was now

the perfect establishment of the man's good faith and purity, made brighter by the discovery of so many excellent gifts, hitherto only imperfectly known, and imperfectly developed. As she came down this same way, the widow in her anguish had thanked God that the father was gone. Now as she returned, she put her hand to her eyes and wiped quiet tears from her cheek; if he had only been here to see his hopes realized, to see the noble manhood of his generous boy.

"Esther guessed this in some way or other," said Hugh, giving a slight shake to his head, as if to throw off a blush which stole over his face. "I don't know how she managed to get an inkling of my secret; but she certainly did make out something of it."

"Did you tell her, Hugh?" asked his

mother, with some surprise, and a little displeasure. "Did you tell Esther, what you kept secret from me?"

"No, mother," said Hugh, this time with a more decided blush, "I did not tell Esther; but from what she said to me, I saw she guessed."

"Strange," said Mrs. Melville.

Neither of them spoke again for some time; and this, too, was a new idea to Hugh's mother. It might have vaguely entered her mind before; but these late anxieties had banished it completely; now she began to think of it with a little discomposure, which, however, had no dissatisfaction in it. Esther, her niece—the sole child of George Greenlees—that *she* should be the second Hugh Melville's wife. The first Hugh Melville's widow smiled within herself with a feeling of retribution, kindly,

happy, gentle retribution; for among all their kith and kin there was no such son as Hugh.

In the little parlour John Aikman is sitting alone, reading Rogers; but Rogers had never less justice done him, for there seems to be perpetually a curl of red brown hair waving over the clear mellifluous lines, the graceful pictures on this elegant page; and some strange witchcraft hinders him from throwing it back, as the proprietor could do if she were here, or even from removing his book out of its shadow. It waves about as if the air lifted and played with it; John secretly prefers it to the picture, and is quite content that it should prevent him from reading, though this before him is the beautiful introduction to "Human Life."

"Now, in Llewellyn Hall the cups go round."

John has quite mastered, by dint of half an hour's study that first line.

"Mrs. Melville, I came to tell you something," said John, with a very bright face, as they sat at tea. "I happened to be dining out yesterday—what immense bores these dinners are! but when we got quit of the ladies, there arose some talk which interested me greatly; who do you think it was about?"

Mrs. Melville shook her head with a placid smile—to tell the truth, *she* was not in the least degree interested—she could not guess.

"Why, this fellow!" exclaimed John Aikman, with a flush of delight, as he laid both his great hands on Hugh's shoulders.

"Hugh!" exclaimed Mrs. Melville.

And Hugh himself looked up in amaze-

ment and asked, "What do you mean Aikman?"

"I mean they were talking of you—you—you cheat—you man of false pretences. Ah, Mrs. Melville, you cannot guess what he has been about, when you have watched for him at night; but they knew it all yonder."

"Who knew it all?" Hugh was astonished.

"I know all about it too, Mr. Aikman, I am glad to tell you," said Mrs. Melville; "I went to meet Hugh to-day and found it all out."

John's countenance fell.

"I am always forestalled," he said, with a comical look of disappointment, "there never is a possibility of bringing a pleasant surprise to you; I thought I should surely succeed this time. Well, Mrs. Melville, it was worth

half-a-dozen dinners to me, I can tell you, to hear Hugh praised so heartily."

Therewithal, as Bunyan says, the water stood in John Aikman's eyes, and Hugh, who was in a very similar condition, held out his hand to him.

"You are very kind, Mr. Aikman," said Mrs. Melville, as the young men's hands met in a cordial, brotherly grasp. "We miss the girls to-night, when you bring such a pleasant report with you."

Ah, yes, we miss the girls — miss them extremely—perhaps more than you think good mother; and just now both of us give grudging glances at the little work-table in the window—why are they not there?

"The speaker was a medical man; I did not catch his name," said John, resuming his story; "he said he had an adventure about this fever, which he would tell us. A

fine young fellow, a medical student had called on him; medical students are not very plentiful here, Mrs. Melville, neither are fine young fellows; so of course I had no difficulty in guessing who it was."

"It was only a guess then?—you are dressing me in borrowed plumes, John," said Hugh.

"Make him be quiet, Mrs. Melville—he is not an interested person; of course I said it must be Hugh, and of course our unknown doctor immediately smiled upon me, and did me the honour to think me worth talking to, for my friend's sake. This doctor—what's his name, Hugh?—says with a great deal of praise, that Hugh has become quite experienced, and treats this fever admirably, Mrs. Melville; I don't know how much taller I felt when we left that dining-room, and I fear it had not quite a good effect upon

me; I have been saucy to everybody all day; entirely Hugh's fault; for what's the good of being proud if one is not to show it."

"John, don't; there is nothing to be proud of," said Hugh; "such scenes, such miseries, such great flourishing respectable dishonesties, John; it embitters one's heart against the rich, and horrifies one with the poor."

"Yes, I understand," said Aikman, thoughtfully; "human creatures all, with not an ideal amongst them; yet this is, I suppose, a benevolent place enough, Hugh; all your great miserable towns are."

"Benevolent but not just," said Hugh Melville, whose experience amongst the labourers at the sugar-house had moved him greatly; "very willing to give in charity —very unwilling to pay an honest price for honest work. Fifteen shillings a-week

—and all these poor unskilled men have wives and families—fifteen shillings a-week —but no one would applaud the master at the sugar-house, if he gave those poor wretches of his enough to live on, whereas when he gives five hundred pounds in one subscription, the air is deafened with cheers. Do you think I am too hot, mother? Ah! but I think I hear Dennis Kelly's poor children cursing the Missionary money. No one has blessed them, or taught them to bless—but families living on fifteen shillings a-week learn other modes of expression, very forcible in their way; and I think the grand cause of the Gospel is hampered by such help, when it is procured by starving souls and bodies here at home."

"You speak strongly, Hugh," said John Aikman; "buy in the cheapest market and

sell in the dearest. Ah! you forget that grand palladium of civilization and trade."

"Well, Hugh, my dear, it seems impossible to help this," said Mrs. Melville. "People could do a great deal just in a quiet, private way—every man for himself—but that does not seem the custom now; you must do everything on a grand scale, this new generation of you, and have societies and committees, and mend nothing unless you mend all. But every man has his own duty, whatever other folk do. Give *your* men enough wages, Mr. Aikman; and I hope Providence will prosper you to need many. And now, Hugh, my man, take a rest, and never mind the sugar-house."

CHAPTER IV.

"So, so! it is a great shame to me, is it? and I presume you think Melville quite as good a name as Greenlees, Esther," said uncle Quentin.

"Yes, certainly; rather better, uncle, if one might say so," said Esther, laughing; "but that is nothing to the purpose. You are quite able to do it, uncle Quentin; and I do say it is a great shame to waste Hugh's time in an office."

"I understood as much by your letter," said Mr. Greenlees; "but you forget, young lady, that Hugh Melville has no claim upon me."

"Why, neither have we," exclaimed Esther, hastily; "yet aunt Martha—I beg your pardon, uncle, all the Nairns, and the Fairlies, and the Mastertons call her so—aunt Martha wants us to stay all the winter, because she thinks it will be good for us. I will speak to my aunt, uncle Quentin. *She* thinks her nephews have some claim upon her."

"Speak away, my newest niece; let me hear what this argument is about," said a lady who at this moment joined them.

Mr. Quentin Greenlees and his niece have been walking through the extensive plantations, which give its name to Fernwood. The house itself peeps through

the trees, standing in a little verdant nest under the shadow of a gentle hill. It is an old place, of the style of architecture peculiar to Scottish country houses, with one round Holyroodish turret gleaming up with its bright vane through the encircling foliage; and this, like many of its brethren, is an odd house, which is perpetually turning its shoulder to you, and seems to possess nothing which can be called a front. Upon the brow of the hill above it, hang a group of trees, which you can fancy have stolen away there like children, ostentatiously to whisper secrets to each other, in the sight of envious playmates; while here and there another solitary straggler climbs the hill, curious about this mystery, though the mass of oaks and beeches, of birch and rowan, of solemn pine and larch below, keep steadily together, and only now and

then, when the wind sways them more strongly than usual, turn their heads towards the whisperers on the hill.

The pathway is not very broad, but sometimes it crosses a little silvery stream, which seems to have strayed there for no purpose save to listen to the trees in their secret council, and to betray the matter with its childish gleeful tongue. Here and there through a slanting line of firs, you can see the calm sky far away, barred in a strange ghostly way with the bare perpendicular trunks of those wintry trees; but generally the abounding foliage and luxuriant underwood make a green wall about you, and only reveal the blue joyous skies above, through a floating network of innumerable leaves.

And underneath, the beautiful light graceful fern waves its fairy plumes over

the mossy grass and gleaming eyes of wild flowers. It is always fine, this *breckan;* in spring when its young half-developed leaves are as delicate as the little fingers of a child—in autumn, when it grows russet like its neighbour trees—but chiefly now, when the brave summer has scarcely yielded to autumn, and it is green and strong and mature, making a forest of itself.

Mrs. Greenlees is a large person, handsome and comely, a very fit personification of the buxom month, in which her new nieces have first been presented to her. A somewhat large face, well-featured, and excellently coloured, with good sense and kindliness in every line; a large figure, well proportioned, richly attired, and a large heart on which not nephews and nieces only, but the whole world has "a claim."

"Aunt," said Esther, looking frankly into this pleasant good-humoured face, "my cousin, Hugh Melville is very clever—everybody knows he is very clever—my uncle himself dares not say anything else; but what's the use of being clever when he's only a clerk in a Liverpool office? Let him stay there, and he'll only be a clerk all his life, whereas if he could finish his studies—what's the matter, aunt?"

"Only this bramble which is tearing your dress, my dear," said Mrs. Greenlees.

With impatient contempt, Esther extricated herself from the thorny fingers of the bramble.

"But about Hugh—my uncle says, he has no claim; yet Hugh is my uncle's nephew, aunt Martha. Do *you* think he he has no claim? and all that is wanted

is just a little money to let him finish his studies."

"What a special pleader this little monkey is," said Mr. Greenlees, "is your aunt to be umpire, Esther, or do you hope to retain her as senior counsel—which is it?"

"Oh, senior counsel, senior counsel, aunt Martha!" exclaimed Esther. "I shall deliver my brief into your hands, and Isabella and I will set to and make all kind of pretty things for your fee—senior counsel, aunt."

"I must understand the case first," said Mrs. Greenlees, who had—of course—a brother, a lawyer in Edinburgh, "but see, who is this white lady coming through the breckan; I believe it is Isabella."

Isabella had a white dress on, the only garb which she could permit herself, less

heavy than her mourning; and her advancing figure had quite a good effect among the trees, as here and there you caught a glimpse of it in the course of the winding path; but Isabella was advancing very rapidly, and carrying a letter in her hand—an open letter.

"What has happened? is there anything wrong at home?" exclaimed Esther as her cousin approached near enough to show a very melancholy face, and eyes full of tears.

"My mother is ill, I must go home immediately," said Isabella. "To-night, uncle—at once, if you please; there is the letter, Esther. I can travel quite well at night, aunt; nobody will meddle with me; you are very good, but I must go to-night."

"What is the matter with your mother, Isabella? it may be quite a slight illness—

no doubt it is, my dear—and people should never tell absent members of a family of these," said Mrs. Greenlees.

"Aunt, it is the fever," said Isabella.

While these words were said, Esther was casting a hasty glance, which gathered the sense, without discerning the words of the letter, over those hasty lines of Hugh's. When she had reached the end, she gave it to her uncle, and turning round quickly, asked:

"Isabella, when must we go away?"

"*You* must not go, Esther. It is dangerous; indeed, I can go very well alone. You must stay till my mother is better."

"There will be no use for you, Esther," said Mrs. Greenlees; "very likely you would be in the way. Don't be angry, now. I mean no disparagement to you; but in a sick room there is only one nurse necessary,

and the disease is infectious. You must remain."

"Very well. You may all say so," said Esther, with a burst of passion, a red spot glowing on her cheek, and her foot emphatically stamping on the ground: "but I *will* not remain. I will not stay here like a coward, and leave my aunt and Isabella and Hugh in the danger. See you, uncle, all that he has been doing, poor fellow, and yet you will not help him to be what Providence intends him for. I *will* go, aunt Martha. No one shall hinder me; and I am not so useless as you say."

"You are a very impatient, angry, unreasonable girl, Esther," said Mrs. Greenlees, in an offended tone.

"It may be so, but I will go," said Esther, calming a little. "I am sorry, if

you are angry, aunt, but I do not think it is like you to bid me stay."

"Esther," said Mr. Greenlees, "be reasonable, and remain. They don't want you. You have only been a week here, you foolish girl. Stay till your aunt is better, and then Isabella will rejoin you. Be reasonable, Esther."

"No, uncle, I will not," said Esther, firmly.

"Go away, then, and get yourselves ready. Leave your luggage—you must return: but go; be quick, and we can catch the train."

"Shall you go yourself, Quentin?" asked Mrs. Greenlees.

"Should I? I certainly shall, if you think it necessary; but this fever is not always fatal. There is Hugh's letter: judge for yourself."

Mrs. Greenlees took the letter and read.

"My dear Isabella.

"I find that my mother and you have been suspicious of me lately. Perhaps appearances were against me, but I think you might have had a little more faith. The consequences, however, are turning out painful now. On Thursday, my mother's fears had been greatly excited, and she came to meet me, anticipating I cannot tell what misery. She found me in the house of one of my patients—for ever since this fever began I have been practising, Isabella, and not without success. My mother was satisfied, but her visit to the miserable place where I was, has defeated all my precautions. I wished to keep the knowledge of this from you, because I feared that imagination might make you more liable to the infection, if I carried any about me. However, my mother came to the place of

all others which I should have desired to keep her from, and she has taken the fever.

"Don't be alarmed; her anxiety had weakened her, and the shock, even of satisfaction, helped the evil on; but I hope her case will be a light one; I think it is so, and Dr. Langstaffe, whose name you have heard, has, in the kindest way, come to see her already. His opinion, too, is very favourable, so do not be too much alarmed, Isabella.

"We thought it might be better not to tell you; but John Aikman so strenuously urged that you should know, that my mother at last gave way. The disease *is* infectious; and I think Esther should not come with you; she will wish it, I know, but do not let her, for there is no duty with her to risk this danger for.

"I cannot bid you stay, though I am very

sorry that you must be called home thus, my dear Isabella.

"HUGH MELVILLE."

"This is a fine lad," said Mrs. Greenlees, emphatically, "Esther is right. She is a hot-headed little monkey, that girl; but she has sensible notions; and it surprises me, I should have heard so little of such a nephew as this, Mr. Greenlees."

CHAPTER V.

It is only six o'clock, and everybody is drowsy at the Railway Station, except the knot of porters busy about the carriages, and one or two single alert passengers, who have come nearly an hour too early for the first train. But John Aikman is not going away by the first train. What is he about at this hour in the morning, wandering along the dreary platform at the arrival side?

He is not quite sure himself, and has said

half-a-dozen times on his way here that it is nonsense and no use—yet he has come.

Only yesterday could Hugh Melville's letter be received at Fernwood, and from Fernwood to Liverpool is a long journey; nevertheless, John Aikman paces up and down anxiously, and makes excursions into the mouth of the tunnel, looking for the night train from the North with strong expectation; although he interrupts his thoughts every five minutes, to assure himself, that there is no chance of any arrival that will interest him.

But himself is sceptical, and prefers to wait and ascertain this. The minutes drag themselves out at a most intolerable rate; and John, who has no companions here but a few lounging hackney-coachmen, becomes quite anxious in the interval; and not only anxious but impatient, so that two or three

times the conscientious policeman has to shout into the echoing tunnel after him, and beg with an affectionate solicitude, which does not earn its looked-for shilling, simply because John is preoccupied and cannot notice it, that the gentleman would take care of his precious life.

But now, at last it comes; and to John's eager eye there appears an anxious, wakeful face at a carriage-window. With involuntary triumph he informs himself, that he always knew it, and hastens, with perhaps a little too much warmth, to throw open the carriage-door.

But here is another wakeful face — extremely wakeful, this one — with eyes a little red, and painful looks.

"Miss Greenlees, too?" said John, aloud, after he had assisted Isabella to alight, "this is right now."

"Do you think it is right, Mr. Aikman? Thank you for saying so; but everybody is angry with me," said Esther.

"And my mother, Mr. Aikman, my mother?" said Isabella.

"I did not call this morning; I thought it was too early. But last night she was—ill of course—she could not be anything else, Miss Melville; but the case a favourable one, and herself going on well — so the doctor says. Now have you anything else? Never mind—leave it all to me—here is your cab."

"Do you go with us, Mr. Aikman?" said Isabella.

"No—no; I shall walk; never mind me, Miss Melville; I should only trouble you," said John.

And imperfectly hearing the words he said, but catching a wistful glance which

comforted her, Isabella was driven away.

Hugh did not expect her—did not think it possible that she could arrive so soon, and consequently there was no one looking out for the girls, when they reached home; but the blind drawn up-stairs in that room where the father died, and the self-absorbed, abstracted look which in some way communicates itself even to the house where dangerous illness is, struck a pang to Isabella's heart. Jane opened the door for them stealthily, with an elaboration of quiet which was more noisy than carelessness; and Isabella at once hurried up-stairs leaving Esther alone in the parlour.

Everything had been done for Mrs. Melville, that care and tenderness and skill could do; and her case was really a very mild one, promising rather to be a slow,

wearisome fever of the more usual kind, than the rapid, violent disease which was the epidemic of the time. A subdued, pale, humble-looking woman ministered by her bed-side, from which Hugh had newly retired for an hour's rest. He had been sitting up all night, poor fellow; and after this vigil, which he had now continued for several nights, did not feel himself quite so able for the labours of the day.

"Who is that?—who is that? God preserve my bairn; I thought I saw Isabella," said Mrs. Melville.

"It is I, mother; we have just arrived. Tell me how you are," exclaimed Isabella, kneeling by the bed-side, her bonnet and shawl still on.

Mrs. Melville put back her hair from her brow tenderly.

"My good bairns!—but you should not

have come, Isabella. I am very well attended to, and I am not very ill—Hugh will tell you so — but Isabella, my dear, what are half-a-dozen fevers, to the peace and security I have gotten since you went away."

"About Hugh, mother?"

"About Hugh—about my good son, Isabella. I am ill no doubt; but the doctor thinks this is not the infectious fever, or you should not have come so near me now. I am not very bad, Isabella; you have travelled all night, and wearied yourself out, thinking me worse than I am. They should not have let you come away so hurriedly."

"Miss Melville, your mother should not talk; she should not be excited," said the nurse.

"Just a moment—will you tell Jane to get tea for Isabella, Mrs. Wood?" said the

patient, who still, ill as she was, could not feel it proper that she, the natural helper of everybody, should engross so much attendance herself.

The nurse withdrew.

"It is Mrs. Wood, the mother of that poor young man—you remember, Isabella—who was in the office with Hugh. Hugh attended her daughter in the fever—be very kind to her, she has suffered a great deal—and now my dear, you may leave me to her a little, and refresh yourself; you must be wearied with your lonely journey."

"Esther is with me, mother," said Isabella, "she would not stay at Fernwood, and now she is breaking her heart downstairs, because I said she must not come up into your room, till the doctor gave her leave."

"Poor thing! she is a kindly hearted good girl, Isabella. Tell her I am better, and that

if she has Hugh's permission, she may come to see me; and tell her I have missed her face almost as much as yours, Isabella, and so have more folk than me."

"Do you mean Hugh, mother?" exclaimed Isabella, with just the slightest possible anxiety blending with the astonishment in her voice.

"I mean—yes—folk never can tell what is to be the result of anything; but now my dear, go away and refresh yourself—here is Mrs. Wood, who will take care of me," said Mrs. Melville.

After a little further conversation Isabella went down stairs. She found Esther there in animated conversation with John Aikman, who had just arrived. In spite of herself Isabella felt a little angry and sad.

"Mr. Aikman says you are unjust to me, Isabella," exclaimed Esther, "Mr. Aikman

says it is quite proper, that I should go to up to see my aunt—Mr. Aikman says you are not kind to prevent me."

"I daresay Mr. Aikman knows a great deal better than I do," said Isabella with a slightly faltering voice: "but in the meantime the responsibilty lies on me—and my mother says you are not to go till Hugh permits you."

"Then where is Hugh," said Esther starting up.

"Hugh is sleeping, poor fellow! I could not wake him yet; he has been up all night," said Isabella, "but my mother sends a message to you, Esther, if you had leisure to listen."

"Isabella!" Esther looked wonderingly into her cousin's face.

"I mean—I beg your pardon, Esther—I do not know what I am saying. My mother

bids me tell you she is not very ill, and that she will see you, when Hugh permits you to come. I was to tell you too, that she had missed your face as much as mine, and that others besides herself had done the same."

The colour rose to Esther's cheeks, as she fixed her eyes upon her cousin's face. Then those eyes went wandering about the room for a moment, with a painful feeling of something unhappy in Isabella's tone, and at last ended by lifting a grave half inquiring glance to John Aikman's face.

John too had been looking wistfully at Isabella—but now his eyes met Esther's with the same look—what was the matter?

Isabella did not remain in the room. She hurried away to put aside her bonnet, and to cry a little secretly to herself. It seemed to her at the moment that she had been un-

kindly, ungently used—deceived into thinking herself of more importance than she really was. If John Aikman had missed Esther so much, that was nothing to her, Isabella thought—the preference could not possibly have displeased her; but to be deceived by a show of regard to herself—to have an unreal deference paid to her, by way of cloaking over attachment to her cousin. A few tears fell silently from Isabella's eyes—from her heart—she did not think she had deserved this.

The next moment with remorse and self-condemnation she upbraided her own selfishness. With her mother lying ill so near her, that she should think of a petty slight like this! Only a petty slight, Isabella—and you make a great effort not to be angry—not to feel yourself wounded, rather to smile and wonder why so small a thing should

move you; but still they fall, those tears.

And Esther cannot fancy, why she is left alone to entertain John Aikman, cannot understand the impatient word half said and instantly withdrawn, the manner of suppressed pain which she cannot fail to perceive in Isabella, when she again comes down stairs. And Hugh looks pale and exhausted —that is another trial to Esther, though he is very glad to see them, and quite blushes with pleasure, when he perceives that she has come. But there is evidently something wrong, and as soon as it is possible to escape from the breakfast-table, Isabella hurries away to her mother's room. John Aikman has stayed to breakfast, and when it is over, the two young men walk down to business together; but John is very abstracted, puzzling with his whole strength to find out what can

be the cause of this, and rather inclined to believe, that though it is only a week since she went away, Isabella must have seen the Perthshire squire. The universal misunderstanding has a greater effect upon their happiness, than a definite and real calamity.

CHAPTER VI.

The blind is still down in Mrs. Melville's room, but the window is a little open, and the faint odour of the mignonette steals into the sick chamber. They have now been three weeks at home, and Mrs. Melville's fever has slowly come to its crisis. That crisis passed a week ago, and now they think she is getting better —progressing very slowly it is true, but still the days pass, and imperceptibly her ailments glide away.

Between the window and the bedside Isabella sits sewing. She has done a great deal of sewing lately, and it is wonderful how long she can sit there like a statue, motionless in everything but the nimble fingers which never rest, and only turning her head now and then, to see if her mother wants anything, or rising to minister to those wants. Morning and evening Isabella sits in the same position; she does not care to go out—she does not go down stairs except when it is absolutely necessary. They are all surprised, uneasy, unhappy about this; but Isabella remains in her mother's room, and thinks it is best.

So here she sits at the little table, while John Aikman down stairs looks vainly at the door, and asks for her half a dozen times in an hour, and falls into fits of

wonderment and moody silence, when she does not come. But Isabella is not aware of this; she hears their voices—she fancies, they are talking happily and pleasantly together, as they used to do, and that no one misses her; and with a bitterness of which she is perfectly unconscious, she keeps down her tears convulsively, and says in her heart that she must remain apart, till she has mastered herself, and been able to put away those pangs of injured pride.

Injured pride—she says it is no more—poor Isabella! but she does not know, that thus remaining apart, is nourishing those feelings and embittering her life. Her tone now is always very gentle to Esther—unnaturally gentle—with an unconscious deprecation of the hard thoughts, which she knows she is entertaining, and of

the impatient word which sometimes—very unfrequently, but still sometimes—breaks from her unawares.

It suits Mrs. Melville in her present state, this quietness—indeed it has been enjoined—and she knows of no sadness in Isabella, but the natural sympathy and regret to see her suffering. Esther is allowed to make a short visit to the sick room every day, but she feels that Isabella does not wish her to be there, and Esther is very unhappy.

Altogether the house is sadly changed; the mother's absence from all its little arrangements throws a certain desolation on the aspect of everything, and the unknown offence which has crept in among them, and concerning which, each doubts and wonders, puts barriers between them and separates all. John Aikman has no heart to study Virgil;

he comes and sits in the corner, sometimes before Hugh has returned, when there is no one there but Esther, and though Esther has no heart to speak to him, Isabella thinks how glad they must be to have her away.

Poor Isabella! she is no angel, but a true woman. She cannot be perfectly placid, and take all this well and gently; she thinks she is doing what is best; and with her mistake sadly acting upon her own heart, upon her own judgment of herself, she tries to bear up as well as she can, and fights desperately for the mastery; which, if it were necessary—if her belief was a true instead of a mistaken one—she would gain at last; for Isabella's was such a heart, as no shipwreck could quench the life out of. Stunned for a moment—for perhaps a long time desperately struggling among those salt and bitter waves—but sure to reach the shore in the end.

On this afternoon—and it is now September—the house is very quiet. Lying silent on the bed, of which she begins to be sadly wearied, Mrs. Melville yet feels the stirring of renewed health, and is glad. The room is perfectly still; unless it be the motion of Isabella's arm now and then, or a passing voice without, no sound disturbs Mrs. Melville's gentle reverie. Within her sight sits her daughter; her mind is at perfect ease—nay more, is full of joy for Hugh. There is no disturbing element in the serene and peaceful future, honourable and honoured, which she sees before her children; they will have enough; with loving, kindly hearts, they will help their brethren even out of their poverty; righteously, purely, in household gladness and good fame they will spend all their days.

The sweet flower-odour comes stealing

into the room, "filling the silence like a speech." The sunshine is so bright without, that there is a warmth in the light even here, though this room lies in the shade; and quiet, unrecorded, grateful prayers rise, like the odours, out of the widow's heart.

A deep sadness hangs over Isabella; her thoughts are away ranging far into the future —not the near future, for that is all dark, cold, mysterious—she dares not try to look into it; but to the far-away, distant horizon, where, in a kind of evening quietness, she sees some one stand, white-haired and peaceful who is herself—white haired, old, alone—much chastened, very calm, a saintly quiet vision, upon which she looks with smiles of sad contentment, which almost break her heart.

And in unconscious contrast with this, her fancy has drawn bright homes for all the

others—very bright homes—all too joyous and cloudless for this world; and Isabella thinks she will be very glad in their prosperity, and for herself will be very peaceful, but never glad.

The parlour below looks very much as usual; but Esther is wandering about unhappy and restless, and does not know what to do. A hundred times to-day she has resolved to go and ask an explanation from Isabella; ask what it is which has produced this estrangement; but immediately Esther remembers that Isabella is always very kind to her—that Isabella's voice is sometimes so sadly gentle now, that she could almost weep; and the impatient girl chafes and irritates herself with bootless wonderings. She cannot be quiet and sew; she wanders about the room, reading for one while, for another idly gazing from the window; and at last,

after a fit of crying, not by any means the first to-day, seizes upon the writing-desk, which—there being no secrets in this household—is common property, and begins to write a letter to her uncle, telling him that she thinks they do not want her, and that, if he will permit her, she will return to Fernwood.

The letter is only half written when some one knocks at the door, and Esther, springing up, runs to the window to see who it is; but she cannot see who it is, and has returned again to her desk and her writing, when Jane, opening the parlour door, ushers the veritable uncle Quentin into the presence of his astonished niece.

"Well, how is your aunt, Esther? Nothing has happened, I hope. The girl has been crying! what's the matter?"

"My aunt is recovering, uncle Quentin.

I am very glad you have come," said Esther.

"But what's this crying for? nobody else ill, I trust. What is wrong, Esther," asked Mr. Greenlees.

"I don't know, uncle," said Esther, sadly; "there *is* something, but I cannot tell what it is. Let me go now and tell my aunt."

"Where is Isabella? where is Hugh?" said uncle Quentin, looking sharply round the room.

"Hugh is at the office, uncle; Isabella is up-stairs. She always sits in my aunt's room now."

"Now! what does the girl mean? I should have thought some calamity had fallen upon you. Have you been quarrelling? Go and call Isabella."

Esther went away without another word.

"Your uncle Quentin? has my brother

come?" said Mrs. Melville, with a little pleasant excitement. "I take it very kind, exceedingly kind, Esther. Tell him he may come up if he chooses; but perhaps he may think of the infection. What was it Dr. Langstaffe said, Isabella?"

"He said there was no danger, mother. I will tell my uncle," said Isabella, laying down her work.

And so she did; but Mr. Greenlees paid no attention to her words. He laid his hands on her shoulders, and looked into her face.

"I am very glad my sister is better; but, girl, what ails yourself?"

"Nothing, uncle," said Isabella, with desperate pride keeping down her tears.

"Nothing! why your mother is better; what do you all mean? You left us looking well and happy, both of you, except a little anxiety. Now all the danger is over, you

say; yet I find you like a couple of ghosts. What does it mean?

"Does Esther look ill, uncle? Indeed I am sorry; I did not notice it," said Isabella, faltering.

"I did not speak of Esther. She looks restless and unhappy; what is the matter with you?"

But Isabella looked firmly in his face, and answered:

"Nothing!"

"My wife is a sensible woman; I devoutly wish she were here," said Mr. Greenlees, with a groan. "There now, take me to your mother; I can make nothing of you."

CHAPTER VII.

"I'm not here of my own accord, Isabella," said Mr. Quentin Greenlees.

"Are you not, Quentin? I am sorry to hear you say so," said Mrs. Melville, with a quiet tone of disappointment. She had been rather excited by the pleasant surprise of his arrival, and had liked to think it an affectionate impulse; but when he said it was not so, she was only very gently and quietly disappointed; for so long separated—so widely

apart in thoughts and feelings, this brother and sister were not of very great importance to each other.

"I don't mean to say, that I did not wish of myself to ascertain how you were, Isabella," said Mr. Greenlees, kindly, "though Esther's first note greatly lessened our anxiety; but my errand is not entirely this—I have come about some other business; can you guess what it is?"

A vague fancy that Isabella had been very quiet lately, and that perhaps she had "seen some one" in Perthshire, shot across Mrs. Melville's mind. But Isabella had only been a week in Perthshire, so her mother answered, "No."

"Well, it is difficult to begin speaking of this, for I may lead you to have false hopes, Isabella—I beg your pardon now—I mean nothing derogatory, quite the re-

verse: my nephew, Hugh, is a capital fellow —it is quite natural that you should believe him worthy of the highest position I could help him to—"

"But, Quentin, we are asking nothing," said Mrs. Melville, with a little quiet pride.

"So much the better, Isabella; you will be in a better condition to receive my—well not proposal, for I have no proposal to make—but to understand what I mean. I hear Hugh has not been sobered out of his old ambition yet."

"I cannot tell what you mean, Quentin," said Mrs. Melville, with dignity. "Hugh does not wish just to sink into a common clerk; indeed, I am wrong to use such words —my husband was nothing higher all his life. But Hugh is not moved by pride, Quentin: it was his father's dearest hope and wish, to see him in the profession for

which he himself was partly educated; and, Quentin, Hugh's father was a very kind, a very good one—it is natural, I think, that my poor boy should wish to have his hope realized."

Mr. Greenlees had been waving his hand in deprecation for some time before this speech, in which the widow warmed to something not unlike indignation, was ended.

"Quite so, quite so—I understand; and Hugh has been already practising his profession in an irregular way, Isabella? There, I have offended again. It is mere guess-work with me: I am only judging from his own letter."

"Hugh has been serving the poor, as the Great Physician did," said the mother. "He has been making his knowledge available, to those who are almost out of the reach of the common good offices of

common men. He has been serving the very poor, and has saved lives among them—all this at the hazard of his own. Quentin, it does not make me more willing, that my son should give up his profession, when I see how much good he might do, if he were fully qualified, by what he has already done."

"Well, Isabella, well," said uncle Quentin, with a slight testiness. "So far from wishing Hugh to give up his profession, I have come to see you on this very subject; driven thereto by a certain niece of mine, who thinks Melville a better name than Greenlees, and by my wife."

Esther had entered the room in time to hear this latter part of the sentence; but Esther, though greatly revived, was not yet quite herself again; for Isabella still sat sewing down-stairs, "being cheer-

ful" by an effort, and as a duty; and she could not summon sufficient courage to ask an explanation.

"I came to see if you wanted anything, aunt," said Esther, only answering with a smile the gibe of uncle Quentin.

"No, my dear, not anything; but what has become of Isabella?"

"She sent me, aunt," said Esther. "I think you have said some of these things to Isabella, uncle, and she is not pleased."

"Some of what things, my niece?" said Mr. Greenlees.

But Esther only shook her head and left the room.

"Something ails these two girls. Get well, Isabella, I beg of you, and see about it," continued the Nabob. "Now, as I was saying, my wife got Hugh's letter, immediately after hearing some indignant

speeches of Esther's on the subject; and Mrs. Greenlees, who is a sensible woman—an exceedingly sensible woman I assure you, Isabella—immediately attacked me on the same subject. She has a greater stock of nephews than I have, and it so chanced that she had demanded my influence, a short time before, to get an Indian appointment for Harry Nairn. I yielded to this by dint of repeated assault, not apprehending that my conqueror would carry her arms into my own camp. It turns out so, however; and, I suppose as a preparative for lending my hand to Stephen Masterton and Robert Fairlie bye and bye, I am ordered up here, Isabella, to see about Hugh."

With a mixture of contending feelings, Mrs. Melville looked at the bronzed face by her bedside. Pleased that there was a

chance of substantial aid to Hugh, it yet offended her sensitive, delicate pride that it should be offered in this way; and farther, that it should spring, not from the natural kindness of her brother, but from the suggestion, rather the compulsion, of his stranger wife. Few things give us unmixed pleasure in the receival, even though they be things, which we have desired before they come; and the widow almost felt, as if it would have been a great pleasure to reject this reluctant aid.

In consequence she answered rather coldly:

"Your wife is very kind, Quentin."

"*That* you will be better able to judge of, when you see her, Isabella;" said Mr. Greenlees, "in that and many other particulars, she has more than satisfied me;" all this the good man said very quietly,

and as a matter of course—he had come home intending to marry at once, and like any other piece of business, had accomplished it sensibly, and was aware of the fact. "Now the only thing remaining to be considered is, how this can be best done. How long will Hugh need to remain at College?"

"I cannot tell—three years, I think—three or four years; but I fancy that is his knock, Quentin," said Mrs. Melville. "He is early to-night; and you must ask him himself."

"Very well, he will come up, I suppose," said Mr. Greenlees. "Now I see no occasion for you staying here, Isabella, when Hugh is in Edinburgh; you had better make up your mind to settle there."

"I am very willing—whatever you all think best," said the widow, rather languidly. "We can get work here, Quentin; that is

the only thing—and it might be more difficult in Edinburgh; but whatever you decide on, when you have spoken to Hugh—to them all—I am quite willing to do."

"Could you live on a hundred a-year, Isabella?" asked Uncle Quentin, abruptly.

"Without the sewing? four of us, with a maid and a decent house, and Hugh's fees at College. Well, Quentin, being very frugal, perhaps we might."

"I don't mean Hugh's College fees. I mean your household expenses merely; the other I shall make separate provision for; but could you manage upon that, Isabella, for a few years, till Hugh is able to practice his profession—or is it too little?"

"Thank you, Quentin—it is quite enough—quite; you are very good," said Mrs. Melville, faintly.

"Are you wearied, Isabella? I had better

take Hugh away then, and consult with him elsewhere."

"I feel just a little worn out now," said Mrs. Melville; "but there is Hugh's foot on the stair. Stay here, Quentin, and let me hear your consultation. I will not take any part in it, but I shall be glad to listen. Here is my son."

"Well, nephew Hugh," said Mr. Greenlees, shaking hands with him cordially as he entered. "What have you all been doing to yourselves, you young people? Look at this boy, Isabella; he is as grey as if he had been in India ten years."

"I have been busy—it is the natural effect of the Liverpool atmosphere," said Hugh, with a smile. "Thank you, uncle, for your visit; it is very kind to come to us now."

"Ah! don't give me more praise than I

deserve," said Mr. Greenlees. "I did not quite come to see your mother. I knew she was in very good hands—you did not miss me, Isabella; but now sit down, my boy, and let us finish our business, for I don't intend to remain here any longer, than I can help, and you too, have not much time to lose."

"I! uncle?"

"Hugh," said Mrs. Melville, now for the first time feeling really grateful to her brother, "your uncle's kindness is even greater, than you thought, though he did not come to see me. Your uncle wishes you to return to College, Hugh."

The deep flush which immediately covered Hugh's face, the quivering of his lip and of his eyelid, the momentary impossibility of speech, taught something to both mother and uncle. No one had dreamt before,

how Hugh's mind and desires dwelt upon this.

He drew a seat near his mother's bedside, and a long conversation followed—a conversation in which no shadow of reluctance, and few ill-chosen words on her brother's part, jarred on the sensitive ear of Mrs. Melville, and which to Hugh opened up prospects, which accorded so closely with all he himself wished and longed for, that he scarcely could persuade himself it was all real, and not the mere repetition of a dearly cherished dream.

CHAPTER VIII.

"I WONDER why my uncle has come just now, Isabella," said Esther Greenlees.

"It is strange," said Isabella, quietly.

There was a long pause, and in many a sweeping circle the thoughts of both fled away far distant, till suddenly leaping back again and taking up the dropped subject, as if there had been no gap in the conversation, Esther continued:

"If it was anxiety about my aunt, he

should have come with us, instead of waiting until now."

"What can it be, if it is not interest in my mother?" said Isabella.

This was not a mere response. Esther hailed it eagerly as a sign of returning confidence.

"I cannot quite tell, Isabella; it seems to me it is not about my aunt, for he knew my aunt was going on well enough. I think—perhaps I have no great foundation for it—but I think it is about something else."

"About you perhaps, Esther," said Isabella, bending over her work and arranging it, with fingers which were not quite steady.

"About me? what could he possibly have to do about me? Isabella! Isabella! I wish you would let me know. I wish, I wish you would tell me what it is."

"What it is?—What do you mean,

Esther? I cannot tell why my uncle has come," said Isabella.

"I was not thinking of my uncle, Isabella," said Esther, now suddenly moved to the proper heat, as kneeling at her cousin's side, she took hold of both her hands, and looked up into the downcast face which constantly eluded her eye. "Tell me what I have done—tell me how I have made you angry. You were very kind to me, Isabella. You took me in when I was very desolate. I have no friends in the world but you and my aunt, and Hugh, and even upon you I have no claim—no claim—you do not know how bitter these words are. You have a right to Hugh and my aunt; I have no right to anybody in the world but my father, and he does not care for me. Isabella, Isabella, why are you angry with me?"

"I am not angry, Esther—indeed I am not

angry," said Isabella, her tears mingling with her cousin's. "I have been sad sometimes—I cannot tell why, but I have been sad; my mother's illness, all that there has been to disturb us—but never angry—never, Esther, with you."

Is it true, Isabella?—a hot painful blush covers Isabella's face. Has she been guilty of anything so contemptible—angry with Esther, and why? "Because she has not dealt with me honestly," said the self-excusing voice in Isabella's heart, which even now prompts her to shrink and draw back from the half embrace of her cousin: "but she does not mean it—it is all over now, and I am no longer angry—only very sad—very sad."

"Tell me what ails you, Isabella," pleaded Esther; "it breaks my heart—I always think I am a burden to you—I think you would

be happier if I were gone. Isabella, I will do anything; I have been very careless, I know —but only smile as you used to do, and I will be anything you like."

"I have nothing to tell you, Esther," said Isabella quietly. "One thing I will say only: you have as much right and claim to my mother and Hugh as I have—never think otherwise; and if I have looked too grave—sometimes even melancholy—you must forgive me, and not ask for any reason. We are all capricious in our humours sometimes, Esther; bear with me now, and some other time I shall bear with you; but never think me angry—that is too foolish—or offended—only a little sad, and that from no proper cause."

Isabella put back the curls from Esther's forehead, and softly touched it with her lip, but the lip quivered as it performed this

salutation, and no one who has not tried it, could understand how hard it was to pronounce those words firmly, and to keep within the heavy-weighted eyelids the load of tears which pressed them down.

Yet not six months since, Isabella, how glad in prospect would this day have looked to you. A new-found sister clinging to you thus—another kind friend above devising generous things for Hugh—and Hugh himself, without help, labouring for the household and supporting it. For each one of these the young heart longed not long ago. To have a sister—a scarcely imaginable gladness—to see the little home bright with renewed plenty—to know Hugh doing good—all those things have been bestowed—they are all prized, all precious; yet never before—never before, Isabella Melville, was such a desolation in your heart.

Look at her now when Esther, only half satisfied, reluctantly rises to arrange some little matters on the table, where now stands the plain tea equipage. There is a strange aching in Isabella's eyes, and sometimes she lifts her hand and presses it over them, for a moment, to keep the tears back, and to relieve the pain. What ails you, Isabella? But you do not know, and cannot tell; people have been ungenerous to you, you say in your heart. Is it so, and is that all? but oftener you say to yourself there is no definite cause, and, in truth, you cannot tell what ails you; only your heart is sinking, sinking, farther and farther every day.

And now here arrives the never-failing John Aikman; Isabella greets him very quietly, and for his part he hardly greets her at all, because it is so unusual to find her here when he comes, and her presence makes

him quiet and self-absorbed. He speaks very little, and Isabella thinks it is because she is here, and that he feels her a restraint; for she never lifts her eyes to see the wistful, grave, inquiring looks, which are seldom lifted from her face.

Uncle Quentin must have dined early, you perceive; for there is no preparation for him, save an additional cup—and with something of her old smile, which flits over her face in such a way, as greatly saddens John, Isabella warns Esther to remember his passion for tea, and to make provision for an unlimited supply. But, up-stairs they make no sign, discover no monition that it is tea-time; and only a continual murmur of voices, and now and then the motion of a foot on the carpet—which foot distinctly belongs to some person seated, and conveys no idea of loco-

motion—intimate that the uncle and the nephew are still in Mrs. Melville's room.

"Isabella, I am sure—I think I am sure—I shall go up and tell them, tea is ready, and hear what I can hear," said Esther, who is resolved to hold fast the ground she has gained, and not relapse into constraint again.

The door closes upon her, and the other two are left alone, to their manifest discomposure; for Isabella fancies she is an unpleasant companion to John, and John, who carries yonder sheet of paper, with its rows of capital letters and figures, and all the calculations which he delighted to make a month ago, in his pocket-book, and now and then takes it out to look at it, and shake his head, and cogitate upon an impossible somebody in Perthshire, is driven quite desperate by the opportu-

nity of speech, which he has been constantly desiring, and which now turns out to be no opportunity at all.

For he has just risen, and growing very red and very white, and looking at his hands, as if he were about to read from them, as he stoops over the little work-table, has cleared his throat with great difficulty, and said "Miss Melville—" when Esther re-enters the room.

"It is about Hugh — I knew it, Isabella, I knew it! My uncle is going to send Hugh to College, and we must all go with him to Edinburgh. Hugh at his studies again — us living in Edinburgh— Isabella — Isabella! does it not look too good news to be true!"

Some little paper-patterns lay on the table; John Aikman took them, and crushed them in his hand. Isabella looked up with

some animation, but Esther gave her no time to reply.

"They are coming down immediately to tea; my uncle shall have a dozen cups to-night!" exclaimed Esther, wild with joy, "so I must warn Jane to fill the kettle."

And Esther danced away again.

There was no time to be lost. Without saying a word, John threw down the patterns he had destroyed, grasped Isabella's hands, and crushed them together in his own, as he had crushed the paper, while, with a half-defiant voice, hoarsely coming out between lips which grew white and trembled, he exclaimed:

"Isabella! you will not go — you will not — you could not be so cruel!"

Already back, gay, malaprop Esther! it is well for those poor delicate hands, which come out of the vice so crushed together,

finger folded over finger, that it is not quite easy to disengage them. John Aikman now crushes his own—one grasping another painfully—and through all the strong man's frame of him trembles, with the outburst which has assumed a character, so very unlike his early trifling with Isabella's name.

For now, alas, there is no possibility of joking, friend John. It has all grown very serious earnest, and no longer a spectre of ridicule haunts you, as you try to calm down the fever this has cast you into, and be moderately composed, ere the radiant Hugh and the uncle, with his slightly sarcastic smile, look in upon you, like beings out of another atmosphere. Quiet, common-place, matter-of-fact people, who have no more idea how the blood boils through your veins, than they have what kind of a night it is, down yonder at the antipodes. At the antipodes

there probably is, at present, a brilliant, lustrous, tropical night, already slightly crimsoned with the coming morning; but here above ground in the September sunset we never think of that. Neither do they understand what your good face means, John Aikman—how sometimes it burns with fiery colour—how sometimes it grows white as ashes—how now you can no longer look at Isabella, nor at any one indeed, save with fiery glances, sudden and almost fierce, and how your tongue cleaves to your mouth, and you scarcely can speak. But you blush no longer at yourself, good John; it has come to a very clear distinct understanding now. Either she *shall* remain here—in your bow-window, at your work-table—or she must go away, where perhaps you may never see her again.

CHAPTER IX.

"Another cup, uncle?" said Esther Greenlees.

For a student of physiognomy those faces were full of interest; and there were, indeed, so many varied feelings, visible in their suppression, in this quiet circle, that it was not possible to be otherwise than interested.

Mr. Greenlees is seated on the sofa; he has the little stand, which does duty as work-table, beside him, to place his cup on, and

very many times already, has that cup travelled, between the tea-tray and the little table. There is a smile on Uncle Quentin's face; he has a pleasant consciousness of having done—not his duty—Mr. Greenlees always does his duty—but something more and higher—something which nobody could have expected from him. It is pleasant to think of this.

And high hopes are on the face and in the heart of Hugh. A favourable entrance into his profession—time to study, and a provision for the household while these studies are going on—afterwards the world, which it remains for him to go forth upon and conquer. His weapons in his hand—his arm skilled to wield them—afterwards no help, no succour, except from God.

And upon those steal gentler hopes, and gladnesses, and Hugh Melville looks up at the

bright smile of Esther Greenlees, and smiles to her in turn. No more need, to shut out from his mind a thought, which he had begun sternly to condemn as an intruder—no more need, to put this sparkling face of Esther's away out of the household circle, when he dreams of it in times to come. "Esther will marry somebody, of course," Hugh has been in the habit of saying to himself, with not quite pacific or brotherly feelings towards the mythical somebody. Perhaps not, Hugh; or, perhaps, this might be managed, so as to be endurable—at least in the meanwhile the household shall remain as it is, and there is no occasion for Esther coming to a very rapid decision, unless she chooses it so.

Esther makes tea to-night. She has come to be housekeeper, while Isabella has been nurse, and Esther overflows with mirth

and wreathed smiles. Such an evening breaking upon such a disconsolate day has made her half wild, and she shivers a lance upon her uncle for every cup of tea she gives him, and does not quite spare any of the others; though all, except herself and Mr. Greenlees, are comparatively silent.

Brooding over the square table sits John Aikman—overshadowing it with leaning arms and stooping forehead. If you look at him closely, you will see, though he does all he can to conceal it, that the fever and thrill of strong emotion are still upon him; that having once loosed his heart and given it utterance, it struggles like a newly prisoned lion, and will not be bidden to silence. Upon his face is a deep steady flush—not wavering, and transitory, but abiding, and his very eyes have an unusual look, as if this passionate colour came from external heat which scorched

him. He hears all that goes on around him very well—notes it perhaps even more than usual, but he feels an almost physical impossibility of joining in the conversation.

And Isabella sits hazily, mistily, as if she had fallen from the clouds, with a strange feeling of excitement and exhaustion about her, for which she cannot very well account. Before her eyes those tangible things and people around her, whirl strangely sometimes, in dizzy confusion, and before the eyes of her mind there flit a bewildered crowd of fancies, among all which there is not anything distinct enough to be called a thought. Isabella is stunned; as if some one had struck her a great blow, uncaused and mysterious, which perplexed all her faculties. How it is—what it is, she could not tell—but strange in all its effects, it has lightened her heart, though her manner is unchanged.

"Another cup, uncle Quentin?"

They all hear those words. In John's mind they raise an unconscious, unreasonable anger; for Uncle Quentin is very much in John Aikman's way. From Isabella they call forth a low faint laugh; but uncle Quentin makes distinct response.

"Your tea is not bad, Esther; yes, you may give me another cup."

"At Fernwood you only get four," said Esther, "uncle, this is two more than your proper allowance, but I promised to myself that you should have a dozen to-night."

"I am much obliged—if the sixth begins to lose colour, Hugh, to what degree of faintness should we reach in the complexion of the complete dozen? Esther, you are not a good economist. Isabella did better, the last time she made tea for me in Liverpool."

"But I put in a new supply for every cup, uncle," said Isabella.

John Aikman raised his head, and glanced rapidly round the speakers—a wrathful glance, which flashing hotly on Mr. Greenlees, and Esther, softened a little, but still remained angry, when it fell on Isabella. Here was he sitting in this mighty heat and tremor for her sake, and she could speak quietly about cups of tea!

"I must call on Mr. Renshaw, I suppose, to-morrow," said Mr. Greenlees. "It will be best that you lose no time, Hugh. When is it, these classes begin."

"Early in November, uncle," said Hugh.

"And this is September—what day?—the tenth?—yes. Well, you have nearly two months; but then there is the house to take, and all the trouble of removal.

When will it be possible to remove your mother, Hugh?"

"I should think in a fortnight, uncle; but we can ask Dr. Langstaff to-morrow," answered Hugh.

"I want you all to come to us at Fernwood for a few weeks," said Mr. Greenlees. "Isabella and Esther were cheated of their holiday; and it will do your mother good. Have you ever been in our quarter, Mr. Aikman?"

To this benevolently-intentioned question, John answered by lifting a pair of glowing eyes to the speaker, and saying, sternly:

"Sir?"

Mr. Greenlees was amused; he began to have a perception of how it was with John; and such distresses have always a gleeful side to the spectators of the suffering, even when, to the sufferer, they are agony.

"Have you been in our quarter?—have you ever visited Perth, Mr. Aikman?—for I hope, if you ever find yourself in the neighbourhood, you will not forget Fernwood."

The fire of John's eyes softened a little.

"No, I shall not forget Fernwood," he said, with a slight emphasis, which shook the whole room to Isabella, and blended floor and roof, table and chair, Uncle Quentin, and cousin Esther, in the strangest confusion, before her misty eyes.

"And how soon can we all be settled in Edinburgh, uncle?" asked Esther. "Mr. Aikman, what will you do with your Virgil? and what will you do without Hugh? Ah! I think you had best come with us?"

John gave an impatient start, but did not answer.

"*We* all!—what does 'we all' mean?" asked Uncle Quentin. "Is it your intention to be settled in Edinburgh, Esther?"

Esther turned her eyes hastily to his face—ungrateful man!—she was adding tea for his next cup—and growing first very red, and then very pale, asked, wonderingly:

"Where should I go, uncle?"

"To Fernwood if you please," said Mr. Greenlees.

Poor Esther was struck dumb. She put in the spoonful of tea in silence, looking down upon it with a face anything but joyful. Then she said, faintly:

"Thank you, uncle," and then sat down, and sighed.

"But if Esther would not like it better—I mean—it *would* be better no doubt; but she is accustomed to us now, Uncle Quentin," said Isabella.

And immediately there fell upon Isabella three separate glances; two of them expressing nothing but gratitude—the third having blended in it a strange stormy displeasure.

"She can speak of everything with the most perfect calmness," said John Aikman to himself, and unconsciously he clenched his hand.

Yes, it was true, she could; Isabella's heart was rising. She sees your displeasure, stormy John—sees it, and would like to laugh, if she dared; but never mind. If she did dare to laugh, very shortly after that, she would cry; and you would be by no means offended with the tears.

"Well, you must settle that for yourselves," said Uncle Quentin, to the great relief of Esther, who now benevolently hurried forward to receive his empty cup.

"No—I think not any more—not any more to-night; eh?—it is very good, is it—well then, just another cup. What are you about, Isabella?"

On a little tray, Jane had just brought from the kitchen, another little tea service; only one cup and saucer, and Isabella, having added somewhat to its load, is preparing to carry it away.

"My mother has not had tea yet. She begins to like it again, uncle, and she will think I am late to-night," said Isabella.

John Aikman started half from his chair, but recovering himself, sat down again; for to arrest a young lady on a narrow staircase, with a tea-tray in her hands, was not quite a desirable manner of impressing her favourably. So with a great sigh, he constrained himself again to wait.

The night wore on—minute by minute;

it seemed to John that he counted them all; and now and then through all their course, the light footstep above gave promise, to his excited quickened ear, of a speedy return. Promise, but no more — for now came the twilight, stealing over the day like a closed eyelid, and still Isabella did not come.

"Now I must take myself away to my inn," said Mr. Greenlees, "those autumn nights of yours in this damp climate feel chilly, Mr. Aikman. Will you walk down with me? and get your hat, Hugh—come along with us."

John hurried after Hugh into the little passage, and grasped his arm.

"I'll tell you what," he exclaimed hoarsely; "I can't bear this, Hugh Melville—and I will not leave the house to-night, till I have seen your sister."

"Aikman!" exclaimed Hugh in perfect bewilderment.

"What's the good of going away? I should only come back, to wander about like a fool when you were all sleeping. I say, Hugh—let me get it over—let me know what I have to expect—let me see Isabella."

Hugh Melville blushed—a blush of natural sympathy—but the steady burning colour on John's cheek wavered not. His grasp was painful, for his fingers were still clutching Hugh's arm, and there was the hoarseness of extreme emotion in his voice.

"Let me take my uncle away first," said Hugh anxiously. "We should only be in the way. I will call Isabella down; but John, my good fellow, don't be so much excited."

"Ah! it's all very easy talking," said John Aikman; "perhaps you won't find me here when you come back, Hugh—and if you don't, God bless you—but now, now, go away."

They wrung each others hands silently, and John returned into the parlour. Poor John! it had become quite tragic to him, but even Hugh, the warm, sympathizing friend, and brother, whose eye had become dimmed a little during John's anticipatory leave taking, smiled involuntarily as he went up-stairs—and Uncle Quentin smiled. You would have believed, from the suppressed mirth in the eyes of both uncle and nephew, that it was all the most capital joke in the world.

And now they are away; now Isabella, thinking she has been called down to Esther, and feeling considerably disappointed, that

John should have left so quietly, comes down the stair with a slow and lingering step. Not so Esther; Esther very much wondering, and considerably excited, has fled to her own room in obedience to Hugh; and Isabella is betrayed into the snare.

It passes away, this twilight, softly rounding into the night, and the stars come out one by one. The house is very silent, and Esther stealing to her chamber-window, watching the growth of one large light gleaming yonder, out of the heaven, as though it was hanging over and might fall, feels her heart thump against her breast, and grows breathless with very wondering. "I fancy they will call me when they want me," said Esther within herself; but there is no indication that she is wanted, and at last, to relieve her excitement a little, she steals down to Mrs. Melville's room.

In Mrs. Melville's room there is a low murmur of voices; is it Isabella? Indistinctly, in the darkness, appears a great figure kneeling by Mrs. Melville's bed-side, and the whispering voice has a tone — a low, clear tone, through the deep happiness of which, there runs a softening thread of the natural pathos, the tear of joy, which does not naturally belong to John Aikman. But yet it is John Aikman's voice; and Esther, slowly gliding away, hears Mrs. Melville say, in a quivering tone, "my good son!"

Near the door stands Isabella. She is trembling a little, and looks very grave. With wistful eyes, Esther gazes into her cousin's face—the girl's face now looking almost solemn, with this new power which it acknowledges. They do not speak, but silently the arms of each steal round the

other, and each has a tear on her cheek. Now Esther, loose your arms—she is wanted by her mother's bedside, to receive the mother's dearer sympathy; and softly stealing down the stairs, with an unconscious apprehension that there would be something irreverent in an audible footstep, Esther, feeling somewhat lonely, goes away.

One learns to sigh looking out on the night. One learns to be wistful, to feel one's-self alone, to fall a-marvelling about one's-self. Yonder, leaning out of the sky, as you can fancy, your great star bends towards you, Esther. Not the red planet Mars; there lies no fighting at present in your simple life, and perhaps there never will. A lucid, pure, living light, looking like nothing but what it is, a star, in the blue, clear skies which have not yet begun to feel the chill, and shine with the frosty

beauty of winter; and Esther awakes out of her dreamy mood to remember, that it will be very dreary for Hugh to return into this dark parlour, and that perhaps even the two people up-stairs, not being entirely etherial, may choose to have a little sublunary comfort still. So Esther bestirs herself quietly, and has lights brought in, and arranges the room a little, becoming herself quite blythe and gladsome again, as she goes about this kindly work.

By Mrs. Melville's bedside, to-day, many plans have been unfolded; perhaps best of all, she likes to hear those, which now are whispered into her ear in her dark room; yet the mother's heart is a little sad. Now the home must begin to be broken up to form other homes; now the two children must draw her heart to different places, must part her between them, remaining themselves

far apart. And a tear is on her cheek, and prayers inaudible, and never put into words, rise up in her mind, as Isabella draws to her side, and asks for the twentieth time, if she is pleased, if she is satisfied. Satisfied—pleased—yes; yet a little sad; and smiles and tears come and go about their hearts and faces, as she bids the new betrothed go away, and lies tranquil and still, thinking of them. "My good son;" the words make Isabella very g'ad—glad with a serious solemn joy, other than her previous pleasure, but greater still than that.

Bye and bye, down stairs in the parlour, they begin to be very merry; when people are joyful, it is not always easy to be merry; but they manage it, and close the evening, with more freedom and less constraint, than could have been expected when it began.

CHAPTER X.

"HUMPH! so Isabella has put out all our plans, I expected something of this kind," said Uncle Quentin.

"Did you, uncle? I did not think of it—I never could be sure," said Esther, quickly. "I knew Mr. Aikman liked Isabella—that was quite natural—but I did not think she cared for him."

"Ah, you are only a little girl," said Mr. Greenlees patting Esther's head, with a smile,

"how should you know anything of the matter?"

"Uncle! I am as old as Isabella!" exclaimed Esther, indignantly.

Mr. Greenlees laughed.

"An intimation to us both, Isabella," he said, turning to Mrs. Melville, "that our niece will lose no time in following the example of her cousin. Esther, who is it to be?"

Esther blushed crimson, gave her head a slight angry shake, and went away to the window.

Mr. Greenlees again sat by his sister's bedside, and again she lay very quiet and tranquil, and listened to him. Yesterday had been a day of trial for Mrs. Melville; she felt it to-day, in a greater than usual inclination to be quiet; for all these successive consultations had wearied her.

It is again the afternoon—a day which betrays the year to be on the wane, and there is a little fire in Mrs. Melville's room. She watches it, as it flashes out those bright small gladsome flames, and sees the light redden on the wall, and flicker about in rapid fanciful motion, with a quiet pleasure. Great exciting troublous events lie in the future; it is very true—but let us put them aside for this one day, and ignore them, and be calm and happy as we were.

For when the lever is applied to this old order of things, and we know that, very soon, they must yield to the pressure, our hearts cling to that which is passing away, and we sigh to be "as we were." As we were—the sigh would be sorer if "as we were" continued and prolonged its life; but now it is the involuntary sentiment of nature, which longs always for what it cannot reach, and

never fully realizes a blessing until that blessing is passing away.

Isabella's work lies on the dressing-table—she has been sitting here as usual all the morning, with her sewing. And Esther, now quite radiant, and happy, has flitted about all day long, constant to nothing, especially not constant to the needle, which is not a suitable instrument for a fluttered and excited mood. This fire, which went out half-a-dozen times in the process of kindling, is Esther's day's work, and she contemplates it with affection, and now and then admires it audibly, feeling a secret pleasure in her success.

But when Uncle Quentin appeared in the street, Isabella fled to Esther's room, and now Esther takes up Isabella's work demurely, and draws a chair towards the window, and asks:

"Aunt, may I stay?"

"Surely, my dear," said Mrs. Melville, "you are as much interested, as any other one of us—stay by all means."

"I am glad to see your tastes are so sensible, Isabella," said Mr. Greenlees, aiming with the poker at a piece of coal, which Esther had just been felicitating herself on placing, in the most artistic manner possible, in the middle of the glowing fire. It was already sending forth half-a-dozen jets of flame, and producing the pleasant sound with which a fire enlivens a room; but this did not satisfy Uncle Quentin.

"In this absurd climate people constantly need fires," he said, shattering the coal, to Esther's dismay and indignation. "There now, it may as well burn as smoulder."

"It was burning very well before, uncle," said Esther, pouting. "There was not the

least sign of smouldering about it—it was a very pretty little fire; but now you have choked it completely—look what a hearth!"

"Well, what about the hearth?" said Mr. Greenlees, laughing.

Esther hurried away, brought a little brush, and swept it with a great demonstration. "They are so ignorant, these men!" she muttered, under her breath.

Uncle Quentin laughed again, and pulled her hair; then placing himself comfortably half way between the fire and the bed, renewed the more serious conversation.

"I called on Mr. Renshaw, this morning, Isabella; he said he had heard something lately about Hugh, which made him almost look for me, and assured me that in the office Hugh had given him perfect satisfaction. This is all as it should be; I am very glad the boy neglected no necessary

duty for that wild enterprise of his: it is all the more creditable to him."

"It was no wild enterprise, Quentin," said Mrs. Melville, instantly roused. "We have not all strength for such a thing; but it was a Christian's duty which Hugh performed, and nothing wild."

"Quite so, exactly so," said Mr. Greenlees, waving his hand. "I did not even insinuate blame, Isabella; but you must know, my good sister, that the world often says Quixote where you would say Christian; and this crusade of Hugh's was a wild, generous, *young* affair, which a sensible, self-considering man would have been slow to undertake. It is so, there is no question."

"Yet many medical men do as much, who are very sensible and not without self-consideration," said Mrs. Melville.

"Very true; there is a kind of professional daring and chivalry, I acknowledge. However, Hugh has done very well in neglecting nothing for this, and Mr. Renshaw is pleased with him. It is always satisfactory to ascertain, that a man has done well, Isabella, whatever his situation is, and I am very much contented, with what I have heard this morning."

So saying, Mr. Greenlees once more applied himself to the fire. The approbation of Mr. Renshaw, and the "business-like" way, in which he had performed his daily routine labours, satisfied his uncle more than the higher and more heroic part of Hugh's exertions. He was not without an appreciation of these, the good man; but they were only extraneous voluntary things, whereas the other was his *duty*.

"I am very glad, Quentin," said Mrs. Melville quietly.

"Yes, it is quite satisfactory," said Mr. Greenlees. "Now, Isabella, how will this new event change your arrangements? In a week Mr. Renshaw has agreed to free Hugh—I fancy there is no sort of difficulty, in getting any situation filled in a town like this; and they say that in a fortnight or so we may remove you. Now, what about the young people?"

Esther's work fell on her knee, and with opened lips and breathless interest she waited for the answer.

"Mr. Aikman is impatient to have it all over," said Mrs. Melville, with a little sigh. "I suppose it is no use speaking of delay, Quentin, in our circumstances—but I think we must be settled in Edinburgh before *it* takes place."

"*It*—their marriage?" said the less delicate uncle, laughing. "Very well, then our arrangements may go on just as before, I suppose? Unless, indeed, it could be in Fernwood—that might do. My wife would like it, I dare say; otherwise we do not need to alter our plans, I suppose, Isabella?"

"Well, Quentin, I cannot tell—it is hard for me to make a decision," said Mrs. Melville. "Isabella urges and prays me to remain with her, and so does Mr. Aikman. They say Hugh might come home here, at the vacations, as he used to do, and that we might all remain together. There is much in this that tempts me, Quentin; while at the same time I think it might be less comfortable for Hugh. I cannot very well see what to do for the best."

"Decidedly have a house of your own, Isabella," said Mr. Greenlees.

"Do you think so? You see, Quentin, Hugh will not spend much more than half of his time at College, and could be with us all the summer; whereas to leave Isabella alone—but it is a difficult matter to decide on."

"What should you advise, Esther?" said Mr. Greenlees, suddenly turning round. Esther was looking very blank—it was evident that she was quite as much at a loss as Mrs. Melville, though her inclination was not so divided.

"I don't know, uncle," said Esther, starting and lifting her work, "whatever my aunt thinks best."

"Esther, I think, wishes to remain with you, Isabella," said Mr. Greenlees, "and if you adopt this plan, she must go to Fernwood. We must not burden the young man with a family at once."

A bright flush mounted to Esther's cheek. She turned away her head, and began to work with tremulous haste. She, at least, should burden no one.

"If I could believe that John Aikman had the faintest apprehension of that, I should make up my mind at once," said Mrs. Melville. "But no—no, it is not so, Quentin."

"I don't desire much that you should stay in Liverpool, aunt, after what my uncle has said," said Esther, hastily, "but we should be just to Mr. Aikman at least. I am sure he would think us all no burden, though the experiment shall never be made with me."

"Hush, Esther my dear, you are angry just now," said Mrs. Melville, soothingly. "You must give us a day or two to think about it, Quentin; and, Esther, you must advise me, for now, neither Hugh, nor

Isabella are unprejudiced. We must decide what will be best, my dear."

A single tear slid over Esther's hot cheek, but she brushed it away noiselessly, an sewed with more perseverance than she had ever displayed before; while Uncle Quentin looked on with a secret chuckle, and prophesied to himself "how it would be."

CHAPTER XI.

"So you are going to leave us, Mr. Melville?" said Mr. Renshaw, blandly.

"I believe so, Sir," said Hugh.

"You are very fortunate, my young friend; your uncle is an exceedingly liberal man. I hope you will feel your obligations, and conduct yourself accordingly," said the merchant. "The best return—indeed the only return a young man can make in such a case, is to devote himself

to the business of the day, whatever it may be, and to justify by his diligence a liberality which the world otherwise might be inclined to blame."

"To blame?" said Hugh, inquiringly.

"Yes, Mr. Melville, perhaps to blame; for in the event of such a thing as this turning out ill, my own conscientious conviction would be strengthened; and that is, that nothing is so good for a young man, as to make his way himself, and be indebted to nobody."

"Very true," said Hugh, thoughtfully, a blush rising to his face. "And there are some who do so. No doubt it diminishes the honour of those who do not."

"You speak about the heroic, you young men," said Mr. Renshaw, "and read about heroes as I see and hear; but it surprises

me often that we hear so little of the heroes of commerce. There is my friend Mr. Argent, for example; that is a man who began as an office-boy, and has raised himself to be a great merchant, worth his thousands; do you think there is nothing heroic in that?"

An unconscious smile flitted over Hugh's face.

"Mr Argent is successful," he said. "I suppose he never aspired to anything more, and he has attained that. So was the famous Whittington; but we do great things when we are heroes, Mr. Renshaw, and aim at great objects; not being rich I fear; few heroes grow rich."

"I am told you write sometimes," said Mr. Renshaw; "that would, I fancy, make the fortune of a literary man—biographies of great merchants viewed in a proper

spirit. After all, take my word for it, Mr. Melville, commerce is the substantial thing; and Mr. Argent is a greater benefactor to the world than any of your heroes."

"Ah! it may be so," said Hugh, slowly. "Mr. Argent has ships; when one of them comes in, he discharges the men, and when they are away, he refuses the poor wives the proportion of pay, which they seem to have a right to. Mr. Argent has clerks; he gives them what they cannot live on; does all that make Mr. Argent a benefactor of his kind?"

"Come, come, you are too heavy upon poor Argent," said Mr. Renshaw, with the most happy unconsciousness of a participation in his guilt. "He is a stingy old fellow, no doubt; all those men who come from nothing are. Bye the bye, you were

saying something to me of Wood. Is he free yet? is his time up?"

"I think it will be, very soon—in a day or two," said Hugh.

"Because, if they were in great straits—if you could be sure that it was a charity, I shouldn't object—" said Mr. Renshaw, taking out his purse.

"To employ him again?" Hugh Melville's face grew radiant.

"No, certainly not to employ him again; no, no, Mr. Melville, when a man loses my confidence once, he loses it for ever, and besides, I could not expose my young men to such an association. I should think I failed in my duty; but if they were in absolute want, you know—"

Mr. Renshaw took out one bright sovereign from his purse, spun it round in his fingers, and threw it on the table.

"The little girl has recovered—they are in less utter distress than they were," said Hugh with a little involuntary haughtiness, "but—I beg your pardon, Mr. Renshaw—yes, I shall be glad to take to Mrs. Wood anything you may send for her."

Mr. Renshaw slowly extracted another sovereign, looked at it, poised it on his finger to ascertain whether it was full weight, and being dubious that it was not, threw it down beside the other.

"Forgive your enemies—how is it the words run," said Mr. Renshaw; "it is a Christian duty, Mr. Melville; you may give the mother these for me, and tell the son if you see him, that I hope he will exert himself to get an honest livelihood, and atone so far as it is possible, for what is past."

Get an honest livelihood—ah, yes! depart in peace, poor sinner, be ye warmed and fed!

This man, a human man like you, bids you go away, friendless and disgraced, to vindicate yourself before the immaculate eyes, which will look upon your agony, as on a righteous spectacle, ordained to increase the comfort of their unblameable selves. Help is not for you, nor compassion—but go, you who have destroyed yourself—leap forth out of those blinding ocean waters, in which you will drown if you remain. There is no friendly hand from the shore—no voice to encourage you in the darkness; come forth by your own might—deliver yourself in your own strength, and then Mr. Renshaw will look upon you from his lofty eminence, and perhaps approve, but never *trust* again. Go, poor transgressor, save yourself.

For it is the Lord only who comes to the fallen—it is the Divine imagination alone, which passes by the good man to save the

evil. This does not enter into the skilful Gospels of humanity; your intellectual regenerators have no sympathy to spare for the miserable, the disgraced, the polluted—no pity for fools—it is only the Most Holy who can condescend to the impure.

Hugh took the money with brief thanks, and went away to his desk in the outer office, while Mr. Renshaw very complacently settled himself at his writing-table, and felt that in the records of commercial heroes he could not fail to find a place. Yet these two sovereigns were not called from his purse, by such a feeble conjuration as the poor widow's wants and miseries—alas, no! they were given to the favoured nephew of the rich Mr. Greenlees.

As Hugh left the office in the afternoon, he unexpectedly met Mr. Ford—the good minister was in earnest conversation with

the warehouseman of Messrs. Renshaw, Brownlow, & Co., who evidently very much flattered, and full of respect and deference, was yet defending himself, as well as he could, against some attack.

"I can assure you, Mr. Brown, this is a very decent man," said Mr. Ford; "most punctual at church, steady and well behaved—and he has been ten weeks out of work—ten weeks! a long time for a man with a family — and there are four little children."

"Well, Sir, I'm sure I'd be very glad," said the warehouseman, scratching his head in perplexity; "but you see, I took on the two men last week, that came with notes from you."

"I was very much obliged, I assure you—I took it exceedingly kind," said the bland minister, "and I really am quite ashamed to

trouble you again, Mr. Brown; but this poor man!—you see," added Mr. Ford, in a confidential undertone—"they have been obliged to part with many of their things, and though the wife is a most thrifty careful person, I am sure they are in absolute want sometimes. A state of things very painful to see, Mr. Brown—*very* painful—I dare say you must have known such cases yourself."

"Ay, and felt them too, Sir—I've been out of work myself," said the warehouseman, "but still, you see there's a many men hanging on, that have a kind of right to get a chance."

"Well, I am sure I should be very sorry to do injustice to any," said Mr. Ford; "but I dare say there are few so worthy as this poor fellow. I hope you'll be able to give him a trial, Mr. Brown—I shall be exceedingly obliged."

"Well, Sir, I'll try," said the man, sheepishly; "you may send him down, and I'll try. It's not quite fair, but I don't like to disappoint a gentleman, and if he does as he ought, I'll try to take him on."

"Thank you—*thank* you, Mr. Brown—I shall always feel myself greatly indebted to you," said Mr. Ford, bowing and shaking hands with the rather bashful warehouseman; "and I shan't trouble you again for some time. Good-day."

"Ah, this has been rather hard work, Mr. Hugh," said the minister, smiling, as Hugh joined him. "This good fellow is not so easily persuaded as usual. Thank you for your introduction to him. To me he is quite an invaluable acquaintance."

"I am about to leave Mr. Renshaw's, Mr. Ford," said Hugh.

"To leave Mr. Renshaw's—I hope I may

congratulate you—it is to go to a better situation, I trust?"

"Yes, I think so—I go to Edinburgh to finish my studies," said Hugh, turning a face towards the minister, which quite gave him the key, with its brilliant colour and happy look, to the kind of answer which Hugh expected.

"Ah—well, I am doubtful what to say; I am glad, and I am sorry. We shall miss you greatly. Will you return here, or will you carry all the household with you, Mr. Melville?"

"We are not decided on that point," said Hugh, with a slight blush; "my uncle is here just now—will you come in and see him, Mr. Ford? He speaks of going away to-morrow."

"I shall be delighted," answered the minister.

And Mr. Ford *was* delighted. Ware-

housemen and porters were, it is true, his very good friends; but he was fallible, and had a weakness for great men too. Mr. Goudie was his star, a glorious planet—but a Nabob was a splendid comet, which scarcely ever before had blazed over his horizon, and it pleased the innocent vanity of the guileless man to be able to talk of the rich Mr. Greenlees. Uncle Quentin was in a very good humour, and demeaned himself with exceeding graciousness to Mr. Ford; so much so, that the minister was warmed into sufficient boldness to speak of the new church then building, and to insinuate a little lamentation over the lack of subscriptions, which called, after considerable besieging, the purse out of Uncle Quentin's pocket, and sent Mr. Ford away rejoicing, with a magnificent five-pound note in his own, and a neat Q. G., in his subscription-book.

CHAPTER XII.

On the same night which Uncle Quentin and John Aikman made so eventful for the Melvilles, Mrs. Wood's little room was full of excitement, less joyous, though in it there was gladness too. The children were loudly happy. Helen, now quite recovered, was not yet woman enough to have much pain mingled with her rejoicing; and the widow herself, though paler than usual, and with

an aspect of deep sorrow in her face, was glad also—strangely glad, for there was deep grief in her pleasure.

To-night Henry was to come home. The coarse landlady down stairs, understood that her lodger was going to the railway station to meet the returning son, for whom she had engaged the little vacant bed-closet up stairs, and the younger children too, believed that their brother was coming from a distance. Most carefully Helen made preparations for this return, and with the painstaking of love in those little fingers of hers, made the fire-side bright, and arranged with the minutest attention, every article of their scanty furniture. You would have supposed that this Henry was the severest critic of household economies. No—but Henry was unfortunate—Henry had suffered—and his little woman-sister would have served

him on her knees, if that had been like to comfort him.

Mrs. Wood has ventured to take a cab; it is true she cannot afford it—that she can scarcely get bread for her children, and that this is, what you might call reckless extravagance. Yes, very true—but the same answer must suffice. It is for Henry; and the mother would take her heart out of her breast for him, if it would soothe him for an hour.

And now he comes in—comes home—overpowered with the loud welcome of the little Tom and Mary, and with Helen holding one of his hands fast between hers, and looking in his face with a smile, which is very near akin to tears. He looks pale and thin, poor fellow; to be shut up with one's own terrible thoughts, for six long months, is not a very wholesome regimen;

but he does not look so miserable and dejected, as perhaps if he were a model man, he should.

But he is only a very natural human man, poor Henry! Shame and grief he has borne enough, in yonder prison cell, and grief and shame still lie at the bottom of his heart; but over these the natural hope, the natural gladness rise up not to be repressed. He has tried to feel very wretched, but he cannot; for life and time still lie before him, and the sun is shining—always shining—shining for ever and ever over the world, which God has once dwelt in for its salvation. He is like the Syrian who found health in the pure waters of the Jordan long ago. His flesh has come to him again like the flesh of a little child, and not able to remember always that he is a ruined man, he comes back with a boy's heart,

yearning for the innocent gladnesses of home, and ready innocently to enjoy them.

It is so long since he has seen a fire, he draws towards it, and little Mary climbs his shoulder, and Tom stands between his knees. With a wan sad smile on her face, his mother turns away to hide her tears, and Helen stands beside him with a quivering lip, but with her child's heart greatly eased and relieved to find, that after all he is not very sad.

Child's heart—woman's heart—sometimes it is one—sometimes the other, Helen; but at least you are not moved with any fear that poor Henry's smile is not proper, or disturbed with a conviction that he should always have misery on his face, because he has sinned.

"And will you never go away again?—

promise you'll never go away again," said little Mary, twisting round her small fingers the thin curling locks on his temples.

A tear came into Henry's eye.

"Never again—never again, with the help of God!"

Helen took his hand—looked into his face.

"Harry, you're home now; don't look sad *now*, Harry."

And Henry's breast swelled as he said "No."

No, he did not look sad; he began to think of himself as having returned—come home—like a man out of a long journey, out of darkness and difficulties, out of the valley of the shadow of death; but now the loving faces were round him like a guard of angels—he was at home.

And no shadow crossed Henry's face till the children had been put to bed, and he sat

with his mother speaking of the future—the future which was so void of friends, so full of evil influences. He must begin to work at once, they said to each other faintly; but they did not ask who would give him work—who would have pity on his lost character, and give the transgressor a chance of redeeming himself.

"I cannot expect so good a situation as my last one, mother," said Henry; "I must be content to begin with a very poor salary—if I can only get a place of any kind, I shall be thankful."

"God will help us," said his mother, "for man is cruel, Harry—very cruel; and you must make up your mind to many slights; they are hard to bear, but you must do it."

"I have deserved them, mother," said Henry sadly.

And then the mother lighted his candle for him, and went to show him the little room where he was to sleep. It was a small, bare closet, but Helen's hand had been here again, doing all that could possibly be done to make its tenant comfortable.

"Good night, Harry," said the widow, and she held out her hand, "good night."

This was not a usual ceremony between them, but to-night it had a certain significance, and the hands clasped with a convulsive pressure, and they parted in tears.

The next day Henry dressed himself as well as his wardrobe would permit, and went away to call upon a merchant in small business who had employed his father. This person had a small office, and employed one clerk, a boy and a porter. With some faint hope, poor Wood presented himself at his desk.

"Well, Sir?" said the man, with rude sternness.

"I am out of a situation, Mr. Green," said Henry humbly; "I haven't much right to ask help from any one, I know; but my mother and the children are not well off, and I'm very anxious to work for them. It isn't a situation like what I lost, Sir; anything I can make my bread in, and have a chance—"

"A chance of cheating your master again, and bringing disgrace on all belonging to you," said Mr. Green. "No, no—go along, Sir—cheat me once, that's the rogue's fault that does it—cheat me twice, it's my own. No, no—I'll not have the disgrace of recommending you into any good house again."

The bitter flush and paleness of great suffering chased each other over the face

of the unhappy young man. He stammered —staggered as if he had received a blow.

"No, no—go along, young man—you've shown what's in you too well to be tried again. I am very sorry for your poor mother —sorry she's afflicted with such a son—you can tell her so from me; but I wonder you can look an honest man in the face again."

"God knows I've deserved it all," exclaimed poor Henry, only with a great effort restraining a burst of childlike tears; "but I want to earn honest bread—indeed, I do. I'd give my life to get back my character if that was enough. Mr. Green, if you'll only help me to the meanest place—I don't care what it is—you'll never, I trust in God, be shamed by me. Not for my sake — I don't deserve it—but for my father, and mother's sake, and because I haven't got a friend in the world."

Mr. Green waved his hand.

"Ah, I dare say you're sorry—everybody's sorry when it comes to the last; but how long will that stand, think you? You must carry that to somebody that's younger in the world than me—I'm too old a bird; and you may as well take my word once for all, young man, and leave my office. I can't have you lounging about here—it'll be as well for you to go quietly—and I won't do anything for you."

Henry turned round and went silently away; but the dumb misery of his downcast head and face of utter dejection appealed to no pity, in the heart of his former friend. "Served him right," said Mr. Green's clerk as he passed out. "Served him right," echoed the shrill treble of Mr. Green's boy; and even the porter at the door, though he pitied him, could say nothing else but "Served him right."

He went along the street with the spirit of a tiger in his straitened breast; out of bitter humiliation rose bitter pride—the rejected and scorned penitence became fierce resisting defiance and anger. He, a man too like other men, had cast off from his soul all the disguises of ordinary life—had laid it with its deep sorrow, its humble purposes of reformation, at the feet of another man—and had been trampled on, disbelieved, scorned. It seemed to him, as if the whole world stood above him ranged in long lines upon a serene eminence, calling to him in derision to mount—flouting him because he could not ascend—yet when he put hand or foot to the flinty ridge which formed its base, smiting him with the lances they carried, and thrusting him away. And fierce indignation at this cruel world took possession of the very soul of the spurned penitent. Not so—

not so did the Divine Lord—but thus was every man.

In a frenzy of fiery resistance and wild anger he hurried through the crowded streets. Where to go? he could have thrown himself down on the hard and dusty pavement, and dashed the life out of these pulses, which would retain their vitality through all this torment; but this he might not do—dared not do—no, he must go home.

And agonized wishes for some great calamity in which he might render help—some devastation, or massacre, or outrage, in which he could assert the man within him, and save and succour still—came like darts of fire through his bursting heart; sick, terrible imaginations of such things flitted before his eyes. A raging storm, a fire, or earthquake, through the bitterest evil of which the disgraced and forsaken

man might rush to save and deliver, and prove himself a man. Poor heart! Poor heart! It was near the breaking when its fancies were such as these.

But the violence of his emotions wore him out, and bye and bye he only felt very weary, very exhausted. The reception he had met with, had for its purpose a desire to "make him feel" the full extent of the misery which he had brought on himself. This "making him feel," is a common excuse for cruelty. You will give the sinner the divine grace of repentance, people seem to fancy, by "making him feel."

But no sacred dews of godly sorrow were falling now upon his stricken soul. This cruel process had scorched them up, and "made him feel" only the sky brass and the soil iron—made him a fierce

demoniac indeed, so long as their influence lasted. Their influence now is wearing away, lapsing into weariness; and here approaches not far off now, and rapidly coming nearer, an old comrade in the office, one who had been intimate with Henry, had enticed him sometimes into low places of dissipation, and often detained him from his home. They had been "great friends," as young men are; a yearning awoke in the heart of poor Henry Wood. He could not bear to condemn all the world of human creatures surrounding him. He grew expectant, eager, as he approached this old friend, and positive affection warmed his frozen heart; if this young man was moved to sympathy, he would almost fall down and worship him.

No fear! poor bankrupt heart, no fear!

The old companion approached, recognized him with a start, looked on his right hand, and his left, to see if there was any mode of escape; and seeing none, looked at Henry once more—said:

"Ah, Wood! I did not expect to see *you* here," and hurried on.

After that, Henry was conscious of no more painful feelings; the great wound was cauterized as with a red-hot iron, and he slunk home through the least observed ways, with a dull red colour burning on his face, a dull sense of shame in his heart—nothing more; his whole existence seemed taken away from him, and all he felt was his disgrace.

He returned home, and sat down in his place by the fireside like a stunned man. Mrs. Wood was sewing at the window, and so was Helen; little Mary

was not to be seen; she had gone to serve a young mother next door, as nurse to a baby almost as big as herself. Tom, the only other useless member of the family, was playing out of doors, and proudly pointing out to his companions his "big brother," who had newly come home.

Henry could not speak—his voice was choked like his heart; and after essaying vainly to answer his mother's questions, there came upon him a passion of sobs and weeping, a womanish, childlike outburst, which to these women it was misery to see and hear. With instinctive haste, little Helen threw down her work, and, going up to him, drew his head to her shoulder, and covered it with her clasping arms. She could still hear and feel the stormy power of his emotion, but she could not *see* it; and that any one should see it—

that even that broad, wide, open eye of day should look in upon her brother's tears, was terrible to Helen.

At last they drew his story from him. They had scarcely any way of relieving themselves but one. They ignored the public opinion which Mr. Green represented, and spoke of him as of a coarse, unkind, sordid man. So he was: they shifted with unconscious sophistry from his opinion to himself, and they asked each other of what value was the judgment of such a man as this.

And then the office companion. Ah! he was a heartless youth, from whom nothing else was to be expected. A young man, with no judgment of his own at all, and whom no one would heed or care for. Take comfort, then, poor Henry! and public opinion is made up of what such men

say—they are types of the world's judges—why then think of them at all?

It was thus they reasoned—a natural enough mode of reasoning—in some respects a true one; and, perhaps, if Henry had been able to go away to his work, as they did to theirs, it might have had some effect upon him.

But he was idle—hopelessly, heartlessly idle—unable to write essays, like Hugh Melville, though he had heavier thoughts to bear than Hugh had ever known. He sat by the fireside brooding over the past, looking out with fixed, scorched, bloodshot eyes upon the future as upon a great black wall, against which he could dash his head and be at rest.

And this was the same Henry who came home last night, with all the natural child-like pleasure of a returned boy. With a

heart which, out of sorrow and repentance, had come fresh and innocent like a child's—with a noble hope in him, purifying him, and guarding his soul like a grand and warlike angel. Now he would drown his senses in any poison he could reach. Now he would intoxicate himself—lose himself—if he could. Happily, there were external restraints upon him to prevent this; but man had branded him and seared his soul: humanity had cast him out, and before this consciousness, his repentance changed into resistance—his humility into defiant pride. Poor Henry! he had been sad, and yet happy in his return; now he was miserable, but no longer sad.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HERE is Mr. Melville, mother," said Helen.

Helen's eyes were very red; she had been up in Henry's little bed-room, the only place where she could steal away unseen to weep and pray; for it was very dreadful to her to see her brother suffering; and the little girl in her simplicity prayed God to send a hundred fevers, rather than this grief to Henry, and reasoned with a reverent heart, though in words which a

maturer judgment might have condemned, with the Allwise, who holds all things in His hands—reasoned, that pain too was an affliction—bodily pain, and hardship; if it would but please God to lay this upon them, and not such a grief of griefs.

Mr. Melville! He who had never countenanced the petty vices of "the office;" he who had been instinctively felt among them as a restraining power. True, he had been very kind to the widow and her children, but his very kindness raised him still farther and farther above the level of the sinner. Henry started up and drew himself back into a corner of the room, with a fierce expression, like a tiger ready to spring. He anticipated contempt again, and he was ready to defy it.

Hugh's face looked a very different one as he came in. Bright with hopes, honour,

health and kindness, with eyes through which the unembarrassed heart shone gladly, frankly, open as the sunshine; with the slight natural diffidence which sat on him so becomingly, enlivened here by a security of happy welcome, his brow unfurrowed, his cheek fair with the flush of manhood; the widow looked on him with a bitter sigh—for there stood her son opposite, with knitted brow and haggard face, ready to return insult with insult, pride with pride.

Mrs. Wood advanced to meet the visitor, with an instinctive desire to screen Henry from him, but Hugh brushed past her, scarcely seeing her.

"Wood, I am glad to see you back again, most happy to find you at home," said Hugh, holding out his hand.

For a moment Henry, still backing into his corner, looked into Hugh's face, and

did not accept the proffered hand. Then he laid his own in it, passively, and drawing away, resumed his seat by the fire.

Like sudden shade, and grateful coolness to a man who has been scorching under a tropical sun. But he mistrusted it, dared not trust it, and sitting down again by the fire, shaded his face with his hand.

"He does not look very well—he has wanted air, and cheerfulness, and your good nursing, Mrs. Wood," said Hugh, with a smile. "I think I must prescribe for him. You did not expect to find me so much at home here when you returned, Wood?"

Poor Henry's voice was choked; he scarcely could command himself sufficiently to answer:

"I have heard—I have heard how good you have been, Mr. Melville."

"Look at my patient," said Hugh, laying

a brotherly hand on Helen's shoulder and turning her towards Henry. "If you say she looks well, I shall feel it as a personal compliment. Helen, you will always remember me when you think about your fever?"

"I never will forget you, Mr. Melville," exclaimed Helen eagerly, "always next to Harry; but are you going away, that you speak of remembering you?"

"You guess very quickly, Helen," said Hugh; "yes, I am going away. I came to tell you about my plans, Mrs. Wood, though I did not know I should have Harry besides to tell them to. My uncle has kindly given me the means to finish my studies—we ourselves, you know, were not able, but my uncle is willing to do it—and this has been the great wish of my life; so you may fancy how much satisfied I am now."

"It would not become me to say I am sorry after that," said Mrs. Wood; "but yet indeed I am sorry, I am very sorry, Mr. Melville; for I do not think we have another friend left in the world."

"*We* thought so; I believe my mother almost used those very words last winter," said Hugh gravely; "but we cannot tell what help lies in the future. It has come to us, it will come to you."

"Ah, Mr. Melville, your case was very different," said the widow, putting up her hands to her eyes.

Her son neither moved nor spoke. He had still preserved his original position, with his face turned towards the fire, and his hand shading the cheek which was only partially visible to Hugh.

There was a pause, a painful and distressing one, for Henry made no sign, and Hugh

was afraid to speak. Feeling the silence at last unendurable, and boldly resolving to do a friend's office here, whether this sullen, resisting spirit would let him or no, Hugh at last spoke.

"Wood! perhaps you would be better pleased with me, if I made no reference to the past. I only do it that you may understand me, and may feel no hesitation in trusting me, if you will. I think you sinned — many a man has sinned and recovered himself; but I think a most cruel and unrighteous system was more to blame than you."

The rock was struck — the artificial restraints gave way. Henry covered his face with his hands.

"No, Melville, no; you're very kind — very kind; but it was myself; the guilt is mine!"

Hugh extended his hand, and drawing one of Henry's away from the face it covered, held it kindly between his own.

"The guilt is past, and so is the punishment. God requires no atonement from you, Harry. No, thank God, that is not left to us; it is all done, accomplished by One who has to do only with sinners. Not with blameless spotless men, only with those who have sinned like us; but, Wood, *men* require an atonement from you—you must render it to the uttermost farthing."

"Ah, Melville, Melville, if my life would do it," said the penitent, with a groan; "but unless they take that, what have *I* to give?"

"I will tell you," said Hugh. "To Mr. Renshaw you must give the sum he lost by you; every one of those wretched gold pieces will lie upon your conscience and your good fame, till you have done this. To your

mother you must give a virtuous home—a son who shall be her prop and pride; to this child you must give a brother, whose very name shall bring her tears of joy. It is not easy to do all this; you must give time, labour, many a weary hour and day; but this, I say, is the atonement you owe, and this you *must* give."

Wood had gradually raised his head; his hand had fallen from his cheek; he sat erect in his chair, and with a clear eye followed every motion of the earnest speaker. His mother behind him was silently weeping; while little Helen, fixing her eyes upon her brother, and believing with her whole simple heart, that all this glorious possibility must follow, would he but promise, stood erect by Hugh Melville's side, breathlessly waiting for the answer of Henry.

"I will—God help me, and strengthen me—Melville, I will!"

Helen began to cry—audibly now—and lifting Hugh's hand from her shoulder, sat down at Henry's feet, and rested her head on his knee. The large tears ran one after another down her cheek.

"It's for joy, Mr. Melville! Harry, it's just for joy!" sobbed poor little Helen.

The widow, whom hard experience had made less full of faith, bent over her son, and took his hand. She saw the angry curve pass from his brow; she saw the smile return to his face, and he met her eye with a grave look of resolve, not presumptuous, but still hopeful, which brought new life to her heart. She stooped down and kissed his forehead. It was the seal of a new family-compact—a beginning of new life.

"But, Melville, I have been repulsed and scorned to-day, and my heart embittered against the whole world," said Henry. "No one will employ me—no one will give me a chance; it was this that hardened me and made me desperate."

"We must make a great effort to overcome that," said Hugh. "I cannot promise you, Wood, that you will suffer no more such indignities; but I will undertake to go with you, and take my share of them. There is a vacancy in our office to-day. Can you meet Mr. Renshaw, Wood? are you able to go down with me and see him?"

The young man shrank visibly.

"I will try to do anything you think necessary," he said, after a pause. "This, I do not deny, will be very painful; but if you think it proper—"

"It is not that; no doubt it would be a great satisfaction to recover one's-self on the very battle-ground where one has been vanquished; but it is not that I think it proper; I think it is a chance."

"Then I am ready to go," said Henry.

"You must make up your mind to endure a good deal," said Hugh. "The beginning will be the most painful, and if it is possible I will not go away till that is arranged. Now, good night. Harry, be cheerful for their sakes."

This was said in an under-tone, as Hugh shook hands with this new patient of his, and Wood responded with a fervent grasp which told his young physician all his thanks.

Mrs. Wood accompanied Hugh to the door, in obedience to a secret sign he made her. By some occult process, best known

to the three sages, Hugh, his mother, and John Aikman, who accomplished it, Mr. Renshaw's two sovereigns had been transmuted into a beautiful crisp five-pound note. It cost Hugh a little confusion and embarrassment to present it, but the widow received it gratefully, and following him in her heart with unspoken blessings, returned to the little fire-side, now again animated and strangely cheerful; for the black brow of despair lowered over it no longer, and Hope, the household angel, had returned to her accustomed place.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Don't take the poor fellow down to Renshaw's—don't, Hugh," said John Aikman. "Yes, it is very well to say that; but what am I to do with him, John?" answered Hugh. John put his head between his hands in his usual fashion, and fixed his eyes on the wall opposite to him, with a blank gaze of consideration. But it chanced, that some-

times a passing figure would glide between the wall and John's eyes, and the light gleaming in its hair dazzled him, and distracted his thoughts. He got up and walked to the window, where no intruding face could bewilder him; but it was still bewildering to recollect that this same face was behind.

Esther sat at the tea-table looking very grave; for the tenor of Esther's life was changed. No more now this home for her; no more the society of those, the first friends who had shown themselves friendly; and Fernwood, with all its projected gaieties, and all its attending crowds of Fairlies, Nairns, and Mastertons, looked but a cold home in prospect to Esther. Nevertheless, she had made up her mind, and was very firm and resolute, not to be moved by entreaties. For no one should ever deem *her* a burden; and

she proudly determined to accept no favours, from one who was a stranger to her blood.

Good John Aikman, meanwhile, believed that Esther preferred Fernwood, and thought it very natural, and was not ill-pleased to find it so; for at first, it seemed to him, he should be better satisfied to have the red hair with its passing gleams and reflections, all to himself.

Mrs. Melville had made up her mind to remain with her daughter; since the moment when this proposal was made to her, it was sufficiently easy to prophecy her decision. A passing doubt indeed of John might cross her mind, like a shadow, after some caustic remark of her brother's; but when she formed her judgment from John himself, she smiled at her own uncertainty. No, she is sitting now in the corner of the sofa, near the fire which has been lighted for her

comfort, with that placid full enjoyment which returning health brings to an invalid, looking at her future son as he stands by the window. Still his shoulders stoop a little, still he projects a little forward his well-formed manly head, and still his progress is sheer on, right over hedges and ditches, trampling down difficulties under the strong unconscious feet, which he never looks down upon, but fixes his eyes in the straight line far away, seeing nothing but his aim. One cannot look at him and doubt. There seems to be something at once morally and physically impossible, in the fancy, that he could turn away into a side path out of the even way of truth. He might be rude, perhaps—not knowing him you could suppose so—but he always must be true.

Leaving the window, John Aikman passes

behind the chair on which Isabella has now seated herself. Her hair has been slightly loosened in one of its braids, and a lock droops upon her neck, which John would pull if he dared. But honest John is the most deferential of suitors. He surrounds her with a visionary reverence now, harsh, though his earlier wooing seemed, and not for the world before all these spectators, would he bring a blush to Isabella's cheek.

"I'll tell you what, Hugh—I've got it," said John, triumphantly.

"Well!"

"Didn't you say there was a vacancy in Renshaw's? What sort of a place is it, Hugh?"

"It's well enough; I think the last man had sixty pounds," said Hugh.

"Sixty pounds—well, I've got a clerk, a steady fellow—I can only give him a pound

a week. If you'll help me to get Johnson into Renshaw's, I'll take Wood myself."

"John, you're a very good fellow," said Hugh, holding out his hand with a smile.

"Oh, yes, that's all right," said Aikman, drawing back his person with a half comic bashfulness, as he extended his hand; "but this is not so easily done as it's said, you know. Johnson's very steady, and has a good head for business. A decent sort of fellow altogether, and—and—he's going to get married."

With an affectionate tone John pronounced these last words; it was evident that this interesting particular had warmed his friendliness into the "wondrous kind" of fellow-feeling.

A slight low laugh ran round the room, from Hugh and Esther and Mrs. Melville;

John laughed himself, with a rising blush, and Isabella drew away her chair.

"I don't know—I am a little afraid that may not be a sufficient recommendation for Mr. Renshaw," said Hugh. "Getting married is really such a common accomplishment John—but I can tell him if you choose."

"I say, Hugh!—isn't he enough to wear out any reasonable amount of patience, Mrs. Melville? What has Mr. Renshaw got to do with Johnson's private plans, poor fellow? Now, Hugh, be serious. He might rise, you know, in that office; very likely there will be no chance of rising in mine, for some time yet; and on such a salary, you know, ten pounds a year is a consideration. Do you think if I call on Mr. Renshaw to-morrow there's any chance?"

"They have all a great opinion of you, Aikman," said Hugh. "You're a rising man according to Mr. Renshaw. Yes, I think you have a very good chance."

"Ah, that's because I'm naturally a rough fellow—no compliment to me," said Aikman; "they think I should be more respectful, if I weren't very independent. That's the reason; and so I get credit for my bad qualities—which, perhaps, is very well," said John, looking askance at Isabella, "seeing that some people give me credit for very few good ones."

"A javelin discharged at full gallop, moderately well aimed, but not fatal," said Hugh, smiling. "Now suppose Johnson safe in our office, what about Wood?"

"Why, of course, he'll come to mine," said Aikman, dreamily. It had just struck him, that he must have a portrait painted

to hang in his drawing-room, in which the baby's robe, and the silver thimble, the little stand, and the paper patterns, should have their proper place."

"Now, John, consider," said Hugh, with more gravity. "I've done all I could to encourage this poor young man; but my mother says, you know, that what has happened once may happen again. Are you sure you can venture to trust him?"

"I have just been thinking that," said Mrs. Melville. "Poor lad, it is hard to deny him a chance; but there is a danger too. His mother is a very decent woman, Mr. Aikman, and that little girl Helen seems almost the greatest comfort, that ever an afflicted person had. Poor young man! poor misled, beguiled lad! I am sure it is a miserable thing to think, that he may have no possibility of recovering himself."

"My aunt's logic is so grand, so fine!" said Esther, springing from her seat to serve the invalid. "She begins intending to warn you, Mr. Aikman, and you see how she closes. You must be a very obstinate man indeed, if you are not fully convinced of your danger now."

"My dear, what have I said?" said Mrs. Melville, in alarm. "I would not hurt his prospects with Mr. Aikman for the world."

"She is laughing at us all, Mrs. Melville," said John. "They always do, these young ladies. See now, there's some mischief coming, when these two heads are laid together. Hugh, I wish you would interfere," continued John, bending over towards the two bright animated heads, as if he was greatly inclined to interfere himself.

"I shall interfere. Be quiet, little girls;

you distract this grave man of business, and make him forget the subject on hand," said Hugh. "Let us go back to our sheep, friend John, before you take any notice of the mischief *they* may be about. Well, this really is a grave matter—what do you say?"

"I say, Hugh," said John, turning round gravely, "that I myself know what a young man's life in an office is. No, you do not, Hugh Melville. To some men God gives a natural spotlessness and elevation, which hinders them of some knowledge; and you have always had a home to return to—this home! It was no credit to you to resist temptation. But I came here friendless and uncared for. I took the apple as Adam did, and my eyes were opened, and I was ashamed. Don't look at me as if you were afraid, Isabella. I *was* ashamed; and my

constitution gave me a cooler head than many had, and kept me from going far: but I went far enough to see what no one sees who has any restraining power, and when I stopped and left it, I vowed to myself that I would have pity, if I ever were in a position to have pity, upon the victims of this life. Why, Hugh Melville! is it an unprecedented thing for a great merchant—a great, rich, prosperous, wealthy man, living like a prince, and almost thinking himself one, to plunge down into the very depths of fraud and disgrace, through wild schemes to increase the wealth which was great before. There happened such a thing a few days ago—only a few days ago; but we expect men on fifty pounds a-year to be above all such temptations—to be immaculate, invulnerable. This poor fellow must come to me; if he cannot be

safely trusted now, he may learn to respect himself and the everlasting right: at least, he shall have a full and patient trial. It is what I want—he must come to me."

Considerably excited, and blushing deeply, John Aikman drew back, almost under Mrs. Melville's shadow, and put up his hand to his flushed brow to shake back the hair, which was falling over it like a cloud. It was quite an unusual thing for John to make such a long speech as this, and he looked across at Isabella dubiously, a little uncertain what effect it might have.

"He will do well—I am sure he will do well," said Isabella, unconsciously, in answer to the look.

CHAPTER XV.

TEN other days full of business, and activity, fly quietly over the heads of the family party. Thanks to the *prestige* of Mr. Greenlees, and the good connexions of John Aikman, they find no great difficulty with Mr. Renshaw, and Johnson speedily is established in the office of the great merchant, while the penitent Wood enters that of the small.

It looks like a great preferment to Henry. So long idle, he touches those ledgers with

reverence now, and does his humble duties as if there was a privilege and honour in having them to do; for mercy and kindness have taken the tiger's heart out of him, and restored to him the man's. He repents, yet he is happy—and to see the little house they have removed to, in those darkening nights, you scarcely could guess, unless it were by marking the singular pathos of joy, which sublimes this gladness of their common life, that crime or grief had ever made devastation there.

Sometimes, indeed, fierce, painful flushes burn upon the brow and cheek of the man who yet bears his reproach — but now he restrains the resisting pride, which it is the natural tendency of insult to call forth, and remembering that some are merciful, is humble and content to endure what he never denies that he deserves.

"If we all of us received only what we deserved, why did the fire come down upon Sodom, and upon us out of the same heavens, only this 'quiet rain,' says John Aikman; and it is balm wholesome and animating to the sinner's heart.

Not what we deserve? God help us then; but we say the words unawares, forgetting that in that case God would not help. Nay, rather God deliver us—God defend us, the purest of us, from having what we deserve. "With the same measure as ye mete, shall men measure unto you again—heaped up and running over." Ah! the Great Father in his grace defend us from being judged as we judge.

And now, carefully tended, watched with constant solicitude and care, Mrs. Melville, not yet very strong, travels to Fernwood; and John Aikman, with a slight grudge and

sulkiness, sees them once more go away. "It is the last time, good people, make the most of it," says John wrathfully, shaking his head with a grim smile; but they only answer him by shaking hands with him, and recommending good-humour, and so are away.

John has some work to do in the mean-time, and consoles himself as he returns to his office by thinking it is very well, and that he shall have nothing to distract him for a month. But the consolation is a rueful one, and he succeeds better when he dives into an upholsterer's shop, and demands to see the work-table, which they are making for him. The work-table is not the thing; it should have been so, and so. John draws lines in the air with his finger in demonstration of what he means, but the smiling gentleman

in the shop is blandly stupid, and will not understand; so, gradually becoming reconciled to the real, which is hard to do, when one has been thinking of the ideal, even in work-tables, John takes a survey of various other half-made articles of furniture, and, greatly refreshed and strengthened, returns to the office.

A busy month—but every night he walks up quickly to the door of a certain house, in the same quarter as that little vacant dwelling place of Mrs. Melville's, looks at it, and comes away again. It seems he must think, there is a chance of the solid stone and lime (this is not mean undignified brick), melting some night like fairy gold; but when he goes it is always there. The trees around it are thrusting their long arms out of their garments like so many overgrown lads, and lay their heads together when a chill wind

whistles through them, as if they were moaning for the coming winter; but, nevertheless, the house, though it stands high, is not too much exposed, and basks in the sun all day, and possesses the river's mouth, and a glimpse of the widening sea. John sometimes stands and looks at it for a whole half hour at a time, and again and again in his mind arranges the furniture within; there is such a bow-window for the work-table!

The month glides away—it seems shorter than an ordinary week at Fernwood, when Mrs. Melville is happily growing strong, and Aunt Martha is in her glory. Mr. Greenlees it must be confessed had cherished an ideal quite different from this; had contemplated a house all to himself, a wife, the kindest and most careful of wives, who should cultivate his little comforts assiduously, and care for scarcely any one in the world but himself.

Aunt Martha was as great a failure as John Aikman's work-table; it seemed to her, good woman, that at "our years" nothing would be more ridiculous than an exclusive devotion on her part to Mr. Quentin Greenlees, or on his to her. She liked him very well—he liked her very well. No kinder wife or kinder husband was in all Perthshire; but "we are not young," said Mrs. Greenlees, and her devotion went no further.

But in honest return for the real kindness with which the Nabob after the first shock, had acknowledged the multitudinous kindred of his lady, Aunt Martha received his relatives into her heart; indeed, not very long ago, there had floated before her kindly eyes anticipations of a match into the Fairlie family for Isabella, and a Masterton for Esther. This being now decidedly impracticable, she threw herself with her whole

strength into the wedding preparations, and making a bold charge upon the purse of the astonished Mr. Greenlees, provided for Isabella such a *trousseau* as filled all the feminine Fairlies, Nairns, and Mastertons with awe and solemn anticipation.

John Aikman too makes a purchase in this way—what is it? Look how he spreads it over those great fingers of his, and blushes, and shakes with earthquakes of secret laughter. But it is nothing so much to be ashamed of, John; only a veil of delicate lace fit for a bride, and when you take it out in your own dusky room to look at it, other feelings deeper than laughter, steal over your face. It is solemn sometimes to be happy—it is very solemn to begin a happy life.

The month passes. Hugh Melville now is ruddy and brown; he spends so much time out of doors, enjoying the freedom,

the air, the sunshine which he never before had so largely as now. The bracing October weather, and the light heart suit each other; and the sky is almost too clear, free from the shadow of any cloud.

Esther too has forgotten all her sadness—has discovered that after all, it will be very pleasant to live at Fernwood, where cousin Hugh can come now and then for a day's relaxation; and where Mrs. Melville and Isabella will not cease to be occasional visitors. Besides that, Esther at present is as much occupied with gowns and veils, laces and gloves and ribbons, as Aunt Martha herself; and carefully measures herself with Annie Fairlie, who is to be the other bridesmaid, and over whom Esther with exultation discovers herself to have the advantage of a quarter of an inch superior height.

Mr. Greenlees of Greenlees is a very small person among the assembled kindred. For lack of repairs, his house is falling into decay, with over-economy his very land is impoverished; but in his parlour sits a red and yellow wife, who punishes the purse which will open for nothing else but that vulgar finery of hers, and which only does that, because it is compelled. Mrs. Melville in visiting them, struggles hard to overcome a natural satisfaction; she now holds a better place than George does; but when she sees George, and what time and penurious cares have done to him, the widow is proud no longer. His appearance humbles her; she can be nothing but grieved for her brother.

And so the hours go away; to all the secondary people very busy hours—to the principal actor in the climax for which

all are preparing, unreal dream-moments which sometimes she makes an effort to seize and to detain, but which constantly elude her grasp. Isabella has a sort of consciousness of sitting looking at them, charmed and tranced like a fairy princess, beholding a long procession sweep past her, and hearing voices come from them which are in another tongue, and which cannot penetrate these senses of hers, oppressed with magic slumber. Not that she is unhappy, or has any sad anticipations—by no means; but only the days glide on—on—away from her, and without the possibility of delay or change, on strides the inevitable Future, which she must sit still and wait for, and against which no rebellion is possible.

When the day comes, it is a great day at Fernwood. It is true that Aunt Martha

compares John rather disadvantageously, in the article of shoulders, with Harry Nairn, and Stephen Masterton, whose *physique* has been remarkably well attended to, and who, besides being, as their aunt congratulates herself, "fine gentlemanly young men," are in addition, quite splendid animals; but, bye and bye, Aunt Martha, who has a genius in this particular, discovers a multitude of good points, in her niece's bridegroom, and takes to him heartily. The house is very full of kith and kin—a wealthy uncle, and some cousins on the Aikman side, having made their appearance at the eleventh hour to countenance John, who is greatly indifferent to their countenance; and so, before a host of kindly interested witnesses, the important matter is accomplished.

As the "young folk" drive away, the

door of Fernwood is crowded; when they have reached the two stately elm-trees, which meet like an arch at some distance down the avenue, they can see still the ample robes of Aunt Martha beside her husband on the threshold, while Mrs. Melville, Hugh and Esther, stand on the step below. Esther is waving her handkerchief, but Mrs. Melville only leans on her son's arm, and looks—Isabella can fancy how she looks, after the departing equipage. Further on—further away—and now again they look back, where beyond a beautiful clump of richly-coloured beech, a line of bare fir-trees permit them to see, between the perpendicular unbranching stems, the door of Fernwood once again; a solitary figure lingers there now, with head bent forward, to see what is no longer within sight, and

ear eagerly imagining the sound which is gone.

"It is my mother," says Isabella, and the tears come to her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

THROUGH the quadrangle of the Edinburgh College pours a host of students; they are very much like other people, those young men, though few of them in their present state of fermentation, and progress, would willingly be considered so. Here is one who thinks himself a very famous logician, who spins out Sir William Hamilton, and delivers him by the yard, till peaceable auditors make a bogle and scarecrow of this

fountain-head Sir William; there are a knot of keen embryo medical men discussing an operation, and yonder a group of future divines enlightening one another, as to what the next General Assembly should do. All of these youths have some one demigod and authority, whose opinions they receive devoutly, but full-grown mature men in general bulk very small among those young athletes; and you have the blunders and mistakes, the ignorance and presumption of famous names, which the world only speaks with honour, freely discussed by the rising generation here. Sometimes this is amusing enough, but it is a comfortable reflection that bye and bye, they will blush for themselves—so many as are capable of blushing—and when they too are mature, will receive quite as rough a handling from their successors.

Among one section of those young men there is some little excitement evident, and several individuals among them are looking elaborately calm and self-possessed. The cause would very soon be evident to you, if you left the quadrangle, and stepped over the threshold of one of those sacred abodes of learning. We do not propose that you should do this, our good friend, seeing that ourself, your guide, has not the *entrée;* so you shall be told, instead of seeing the cause. It is that various gentlemen are to-day to undergo their examination for the degree of M.D.

There is nothing remarkable about this quadrangle. It does not strike you in the least, except with a sense of oppression and breathlessness; and it is rather a wearisome time which we spend here, pacing along its

secluded, solitary pavement, waiting for the exit of the students, and of the new M.D.'s; but now at last they come. The excitement has increased considerably, and the self-possessed men look very limp and exhausted—this which they have just gone through is rather a hard ordeal—but their old classmates crowd round them to congratulate and shake hands. The conversation is of quite a peculiar kind, strongly savouring of the profession; but there are some things in it which interest us, so we may pause and listen.

"Melville is king of the day. Fuller says Melville's thesis is masterly," exclaimed one eager youth. "They say he'll publish it—it's on the Irish fever, a Liverpool epidemic, and every one is anxious to know where he got so much experience."

"Melville's one of your quiet men—he's

hunted it out of books," said the partizan of another youthful doctor.

"Fuller says an experienced physician could not have shown more knowledge of the subject," said the first speaker. "They say there has not been a thesis like it, for I can't tell how many years; and all the Professors have asked Melville to publish it."

"It *must* be taken out of other men's books you know," said the opponent, "or else it can't be true. Perhaps it was mere guess work and hypothesis; for where could Melville get experience?"

"I can't tell. I'm only repeating what Fuller said—there he is himself with Melville."

The Professor came out, talking with evident interest and friendliness to the young man beside him. This young man like the other examinants looked somewhat exhausted,

but his eye was very bright, and his face serious, though animated. Older by four years than when his sister was married, Hugh Melville looks no longer a youth. His brow is not quite so smooth, his step is a little bolder, his voice perhaps more decided in its tone, but there is not the least difficulty in recognizing the Hugh Melville of the Liverpool fever, the clerk in Mr. Renshaw's office, the sole son of the widow. To-day he has concluded all that is preparatory in his life; for the future he hopes to *do*, to labour, not for himself alone but others—to be no longer a youth, a student, but a helpful and skilful man.

"Yes, you must publish it," said the Professor kindly; "there are few cases in which I should recommend this, for the bare reasonings of mere knowledge, Mr. Melville—and young men generally write so—are of no

great value to any one. Knowledge after all, so long as it only remains in the brain, is a dead unprofitable thing; but this is quite a different kind of production. Unless you intend me to believe that you are a great genius, able to enter by intuition into all the circumstances and symptoms you have described, and make living matter of dry facts gleaned out of books, you must let me know where you got your experience; in any case let the thesis be published."

"I am no genius, Professor," said Hugh, "and I should have told you at once and simply, how my experience was acquired had I not believed, that you might agree with myself in thinking, that I made a very rash and bold venture, in what I did four years ago. The Irish fever raged terribly in Liverpool then. Some ignorant people who knew I had been intended for the medical profes-

sion, and to whom the having been at College was quite enough, sent for me to see a very poor miserable woman. I went—I prescribed; she became worse, and it made me almost frantic; so by another bold venture I secured her a visit from one of our most famous physicians yonder, who approved what I had done, and persuaded me to go on. After that, in the evenings when I left the office where I was then employed, I saw other patients. They were all very poor, and one led me to another. So now, Sir, you have my confession."

"It is a singular one," said the Professor, after a pause. "I have shrived few such penitents. Mr. Melville, you have begun your work well; ours is a profession full of discouragements to men of ordinary flesh and blood; so much so, that I am glad myself to be relieved from the necessity of

practice; but it is a profession, as I hold, which ought to be almost the highest in the world. Our brethren in the ministry, it is true, have the soul to deal with, while we only profess to heal the body; but physical pain, when it comes to be agony, is a fearful sight, Mr. Melville, and every pang of it I have seen convulse the very soul. You will not forget, I trust, that your vocation extends to both, and that you leave your Alma Mater if not a professed man-fisher, as quaint old Boston says, at least a healer of men, consecrated and prepared—I should say set apart as much as by ordination—and I hope you will remember this constantly in all your future labours."

A healer of men! Not only a receiver of fees, a bland adviser of hypochondriacs; but a man commissioned and sent forth to mitigate the agonies, to remove the pains of other

men. His loins girded, not with the careful training of knowledge alone, but with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in his hand, not only the gracious herbs and essences which Heaven has ordained to be wherever suffering is, but the cup of blessing, the water of life. In his lips the law of kindness, in his heart the mercy and universal compassion which is not of earth but heaven. And thus he must go abroad into a world, which is full of labour for him; where the diseased, the miserable, the afflicted, shall never cease to be until the end.

In a spacious room, in one of the Edinburgh hotels, a little party wait for Hugh. Their windows look out upon the old town of Edinburgh, which, at the present moment, however, neither of these watchers feel any interest in. The hum of the constantly shifting gay crowd which strays along this

Princes Street, so unlike the crowd of a commercial town, ascends perhaps a little too loudly into the apartment; but in ordinary times, and with a disengaged mind, there is amusement in the scene. Those good people have no business to do, nor anything particular to occupy them. They are enjoying the spring sunshine, the hopeful, elastic air, the gay street—themselves—themselves, perhaps, most of all; and many an eye among them glances with respect and admiration at those Princes Street shops, which it seems to them the country can scarcely match, and certainly not excel, while they think very slightingly of the grand old Castle, just now sending out his great rough cannon voice into all the echoes of the hills.

At one window stands a young lady; an old lady sits at the other. Mrs. Melville looks a little expectant, not anxious; but

seems younger now than she did four years ago. The hair, perhaps, under her widow's cap, is nearer white than it was then; but her eyes are clear and liquid, as are her children's; and the buoyant joyous look—not contented, but something better than contented—telling a spirit ready to possess, and occupy, and fairly live in all the mercies of God's bestowing, great and small, has returned to its full dominion in those features of hers, which past sorrow have still softened and experimented on. Mrs. Melville looks out, not to that white smoke floating from the battlement on yonder hoary rock, which the wind lifts gently like the beard of some ancient cavalier glimmering over his steel corselet in memory of his slain King—no, truly, it is something very much more prosaic which Mrs. Melville looks at—the stream of passengers flowing downward through the

sloping street, which descends over the Mound, and she is waiting for Hugh.

Esther, at the other window looks considerably fluttered and excited; not that she fears at all for Hugh; but the success of his examination is uncertain, and she cannot help being anxious. For Esther will be very far from satisfied if Hugh only passes his examination "like other people." She is two-and-twenty now, but she is very little wiser. Isabella has grown quite an experienced person; but Esther Greenlees is Esther Greenlees still.

Behind these watchers, on a sofa reclines Aunt Martha. Aunt Martha has—a little son. The fact is embarrassing, but not to be disputed; and though both the parents of the young heir of Fernwood were a good deal perplexed by his arrival, and felt him rather an intruder, little Quentin now, being two

years old, has come to be the hero of their life. He is at present discoursing at great length, and with much eloquence, to the very indulgent papa in the easy-chair by the fire; for though it is April, Mr. Greenlees cannot give up this centre of warmth, and kindliness, and just now basks before it very pleasantly, interrupting now and then with a "yes" or "no," the animated monologue of the young Quentin Greenlees.

"Can you not see Hugh yet, Esther?" asked Aunt Martha. "What can they be doing with him so long? Poor fellow! we should have gone to meet him, or sent a cab. He will be quite exhausted."

"There he is—there he is," exclaimed Mrs. Melville, while Esther sprang impatiently from the window to throw the door wide open, though he was yet at some distance. "He looks quite bright and animated—now

he is waving his hand—he must have got well through his examination."

"Of course he has," said Aunt Martha, rising in time to catch a glimpse of Hugh, as he crossed the street. "Did I not always tell you there was nothing to be anxious about—such a young man as that!"

"Thank you—thank you," said Mrs. Melville; but she did not know what she was saying, for her ears were strained to catch Hugh's footstep on the stair.

"Uncle," said Hugh, "I speak to you first, because it is your work. They have been very kind to me. They have made this examination rather a triumph than a trial; and now I thank you for the education which is finished. Mother, wait a moment, I can tell you my whole story now."

"Shake hands, Hugh," said Mr. Greenlees. "I always thought you were a capital

fellow. Don't thank me. I'll be proud of you, my boy."

The "shake hands" went round; descending in a regular line from Quentin the elder to Quentin the younger, who came to Hugh's knee immediately, and demanded to know if he, Hugh, had been a bad boy, and was going to be put to bed.

"They want me to publish my thesis, mother," said Hugh, his face kindling all over with modest pleasure. "They say—but I can't very well tell you all that Professor Fuller was good enough to say—they want me to translate the thesis, and publish it; and say that it would be—it looks very ridiculous you know, but they say it—a standard book on the subject."

After this there were a few exclamations uttered, the strength of which lay in their tone, and not in their words, from the faint

"Oh!" which dropped out of Esther's parted lips, relieving her like a great sigh, to the "Capital, Hugh!" with which Mr. Greenlees rounded his satisfaction.

"For my part I cannot see what you all look so surprised at," said Aunt Martha, from the sofa. "My dear sister, how is it possible, you could be that young man's mother, and ever doubt his success?"

"Thank you, aunt," said Hugh.

"Nay, Hugh, you need not thank me; I only tell you what was quite evident to any unbiassed person. Your mother, you see, is too anxious; so is Esther."

Hugh turned half round to glance at Esther as this was said; but Esther had withdrawn herself, and almost concealed under the drapery of the curtain at Mrs. Melville's window, was again looking out upon the street.

"It will cost you some labour getting this ready for the press, Hugh," said Mr. Greenlees; "you had better come to Fernwood and do it. Summer is coming; bring down all these Aikman people, and let us have a family party."

"Isabella has never seen Quentin since he began to speak," said Aunt Martha, in a parenthesis.

"But, uncle, if I settle in Liverpool," began Hugh.

"Settle! I believe the boy will be getting married next," said Uncle Quentin.

Under the curtain you could see Esther move uneasily, and Hugh took the face of his little cousin between his hands, and leant down over it, to hide a blush.

"If I settle in Liverpool," continued Hugh, clearing his throat, "it will be best for me, uncle, to lose no time. I think, besides the

advantage of being near my mother and Isabella, that I shall have a better chance there than in Edinburgh or the country; and when we are up just now, I think my best plan will be to look for a suitable opening, and if I can find it, to begin at once."

"You will need a good house, Hugh," said Aunt Martha.

"Bye and bye, aunt, but just now there is no occasion for that; and I think the beginning need not be very expensive. All that, we can see about, my mother and I; but I shall be very well content with such a fair start as I have just now, however humbly I may be lodged at first."

"It would hurt you, Hugh—it would injure you," said Aunt Martha; "it is not good to be too humble; I don't approve of it. Are you resolved, then, to start to-morrow?"

"Perhaps I had better not go just now, aunt," said Esther.

"Why, my dear?" asked the simple Mrs. Melville.

"Because—because with so much business to attend to, you—you will be occupied, aunt," faltered Esther Greenlees, drawing patterns on the carpet with her foot, and looking fluttered and uneasy.

Hugh did not say anything, but he started to his feet, and took up a position behind a great easy-chair, very nearly overturning little Quentin.

"But you have promised, Esther; you are prepared; Isabella expects you. My dear, you could not disappoint us so," said Mrs. Melville.

"It's all nonsense," said Aunt Martha briskly, "a mere girlish fancy. You had better go at once and get those ribbons you

want, Esther. Hugh will go with you; and I have a little commission to give you too."

"It's only down the street—no one need go with me, Aunt Martha; I shall only be ten minutes," said Esther, hurrying away.

But an hour after, Esther had not returned, and instead of buying ribbons "down the street," Esther was standing on the breezy sea-looking side of the Calton Hill, gazing vaguely away over the Forth, and seeing nothing though her eyes rested on the opposite coast. The new M.D. stood beside her; they were doubtless talking of his thesis, and this it was without question which gave so dreamy a look to Esther's eyes.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE room is not very large. When you look at it first, it seems to be all one great bow-window, so much does it take the shape, and so full is it of the light, which streams in through those ample panes. The winds sometimes visit this quarter sharply, so the window does not reach the floor; and you can see, that in winter the apartment is as comfortable, as in summer it is lightsome. This present evening is not winter, neither is it

summer: it is beautiful April, the kindly handmaiden which goes between the twain; and a little fire, all ruddy and sparkling—not breathless, as fires usually become in the spring—plays hide and seek with the shadows in the corners, and, by some occult process, reaching up to the great mirror above the mantel-piece, dives into its lucid depths, and plays fantastic tricks with the blank, mysterious, unfathomable region which lies within its gilded frame.

On either side of the fireplace is a recess, pleasantly furnished with books. The table has been removed rather farther from the hearth than usual, but is still near enough to catch a ruddy reflection upon the sparkling china and silver of its tea-service. There are a few pictures on the walls—portraits with only one exception—for pictures are expensive gear, above the reach

of young housekeepers in the circumstances of those, who occupy this house.

The sun out of the western sky throws in a slanting ray, just above the head of some one sitting at the window. He shines here all day long; they are almost glad sometimes when yonder visibly within their sight, he descends to the other waiting hemisphere under those blazing waters. Warm crimson draperies shade the sides of this great window, and within them stands a low chair and a work-table—a very graceful, pretty work-table, something like the one which John Aikman dreamed of long ago. Just now there reposes on it a silver thimble—something more — a white, small hand and delicate wrist, leaning there leisurely while its proprietor looks out upon the setting sun.

She is dressed one cannot tell exactly

how—gracefully it is sure—and not in the colourless white or black which one individual long ago objected to as unbecoming Isabella Melville. Good fellow! he is not so shy of Isabella Melville now. Himself is leaning on the back of her chair, with a great hand resting on her shoulder. It chances to be a very beautiful night, and they are looking, where they never tire of looking, towards the river's mouth and the sea.

The sky is not quite clear. Great sand-banks, and snowy hills of cloud roll over upon the sun, and hide him; and ever and anon he bursts out reappearing, and besets an isolated cloudy crag with his triumphant rays, flouting it with a kind of brilliant joyous scorn, which beautifies the obstruction it disdains. Silently passes out yonder great steamer, throwing up a black

column of smoke relieved with the most delicate snowy lining, from that prosaic escape-valve, which here sends no hissing sound into our ears, to mar the beauty. The little iron steamers pass silently across from side to side, like diligent servants, too busy to make demonstration of the work they go about continually. If you have clear eyes, and place yourself at the other side of the window opposite Isabella, you will be able to discern the mouth of the great Birkenhead Float, and the congregation of little red sloops, with one strange mast and a multitude of dangling pulleys, which whisper about its edge; and here and there from Birkenhead downward to the river's mouth, lie great anchored ships, peacefully over-looking the little ones which shoot past them on every side. Between the window and the river lies a

stretch of half built land, the seedy margin of the town, worn out and exhausted by brickfields, and other forced contributions to the comfort of the heavily loaded acres, on which human people swarm like insects. If you were exploring this intervening space you would find it sufficiently uncomfortable, but distance throws upon the clay soil a faint mantle of green; and yonder along that elevated road, a railway train dashes forth with its black helmet and snowy plume, like a knight into the lists; while down below, like something of the old world, steals a little dim unnoticed canal, carrying a boat of the kind once called swift, upon its sluggish tide.

Trees just beginning to shake out their fresh young foliage from the buds, step daintily up the edges of the smooth steep lawn, which slopes from the window of the

dining-room below; and showers of primroses lie at their feet. The road is a shaded avenue-like road without, for just opposite, a screen of old trees—old for this quarter—keep guard over an unseen secluded house, which you can only get a glimpse of through its gate. There is no traffic in this quiet road, but from the little streets which have sprung up in the neighbourhood, come many walkers, meditating—or perhaps not meditating—at eventide. It is very true some of them have pipes in their mouths, many of them are not remarkable for dress; what then? their voices soften as pleasantly in the pure ringing air, as if they pronounced only such dainty syllables as the ladies and gentlemen may speak; and these good people are enjoying themselves.

So are the children, who here strike about through the blue air that flying shuttlecock

with its white feathers; so this other little band, racing down the slope with their hoops. Over the whole wide scene there is an air of placid enjoyment. No doubt under those quiet skies lie many miseries, but a wider-spreading, more universal human sentiment of pleasure, like the great atmosphere covers all.

Upon Isabella's knee lies once more a long robe of snowy muslin, which you will see, if you look closely, is very richly worked —is being very richly worked, for it is still in progress. Something lies on a side table, which explains this robe in some degree — a baby's coral with its silver bells—for Isabella no longer works for the shop.

"Are you sure they do not arrive till seven? It is certainly time we were away to meet them, John," said Isabella.

"Not quite time yet. Are *you* going, Tibbie?" asked John.

"Perhaps it would be better that I did not go," said Isabella, with no visible resentment of the name. "It looks dreary to have no one waiting at home with a welcome. No, I dare say it will be best for me to stay and have tea ready. John, you are sure to be too late."

"I'm going instantly. I say, Isabella, we'll have little Tibs in the nursery married, before you get her frock done—it'll do for your grand-daughter."

"Be quiet, John," said Mrs. Aikman, sedately; "what do you know about frocks? Besides, you know, you must not call Isabella Tibs—my mother does not like it."

"Only yourself then; very well, the daughter shall have the undiminished glory of her name. I used to call you Tibbie,

Isabella, long ago, when I blushed even to address you as Miss Melville."

"Ah, you were always a bad fellow, John," said his wife. "What is this? a cab—and my mother, and Esther, and Hugh! Ah, John, John, that Bradshaw! Here they are."

Looking very guilty, John rushed down stairs to receive his guests. Though somewhat travel-soiled and weary, the little party looked quite radiant, and there was a certain gravity and importance which you sometimes could detect flitting over the usual expression, now of some face, now of another, which whispered of one secret common to them all. But John, as he rushed to the cab, and made a plunge at the door, and Isabella, as she hurried after him to receive them as they alighted, took no notice of this. Natural affection and pleasure, shawls, cloaks, carpet-

bags and trunks, not to speak of an anathema launched at the head of the offending Bradshaw, occupied them too completely to leave time for investigating the secrets of these fluctuating faces.

"Come along, Doctor Hugh; never mind the luggage," said John. "Come in, man, and let's look at you! He blushes, Isabella. What's happened, I wonder."

"He blushes under his honours," said Isabella, pausing as she toiled deliberately up stairs, with shawls enough about her to meet a Russian winter. "Hugh, what is it that Esther says about the thesis? Quick! come up and let us hear."

"They say he's to publish it; it's sure to be a standard book on the subject!" exclaimed Esther, breathlessly, turning round at the head of the stair, and making a speech to the procession which ascended. "The

Professor said nobody could have such experience who was a mere student, and that Hugh had perfectly mastered the subject, Isabella."

"The subject — what subject?" asked John, as they halted within Isabella's pretty drawing-room; "what's about this thesis, Hugh—or rather what is it about? I thought it was only a kind of school-boy exercise. How have you got all this honour and glory?"

"No honour and glory, John. Well then, just a little. Oh! don't think I am setting up for a stoic," said Hugh, laughing, "for honour and glory are good creatures, not to be despised. The thesis is only a bit of experience, nothing more — but students, as Esther says, seldom have it in their power to acquire such experience as I had. This is no cheerful matter, though in the end it has

brought us pleasure. My subject was the fever, John,"

"Ah! the fever here." John's face grew grave and interested.

"Well, as it is only the result we are interested in, we had better go to the nursery, mother," said Isabella; "and then, Esther, you shall have your hair smoothed and get tea; come do not let us wait for this medical lecture."

Esther put up her hands to her curls, which were a little disarranged, and blushed.

"My hair will not keep in order, Isabella," said Esther, humbly. "It was worse than this, when I came to you the first time; I remember my aunt was shocked. Come, aunt."

"Go on, Hugh," said John Aikman, as the ladies left the room.

"Oh! what did you say, John? it was her hair she was talking of," said Hugh.

"Her hair—what's this now?" said John, laughing, and rubbing his forehead. "I suspect something else must have happened as important as the thesis. Doctor, you may laugh, it is not undignified, whereas it is a pity to bite your lip."

In obedience to this encouraging address, Hugh did laugh — but the sound of his laughter was somewhat excited and tremulous.

"Do you think Isabella will be pleased, John?" asked the new M.D.

"What would you have her to be pleased with, Hugh?"

Ah, John Aikman! once upon a time you were very shy—once upon a time you overwhelmed yourself with storms of ridicule; but now this is a capital joke to you, some-

thing worthy of the kindliest, most genuine and good-humoured laughter. Just now, for the mischief's sake, you are looking very grave, that your hapless brother there may be tortured a little at the confessional; and when he does confess, the sound of your glee will reach the half awakened baby, and startle her into just such a surprised look, and such wide-open eyes, as Esther, bending over her, desires to see."

Hugh was silent for a little—and there was no more laughter in his face.

"I will tell you what I would have for myself, John—such a home, and such a household life as you."

The good heart of John Aikman was touched. He held out his hand.

"You will be very happy—I think God has blessed us all in this," said John, under his breath.

They stood together for a moment looking silently round the room. All those dumb pieces of furniture had grown sacred with the charm of home. The little chair by the window yonder, and its work-table, are the lyrics of John Aikman's manly heart; and here are other chairs nearer the fire-place, carrying emotions in them deeper and graver, perhaps dearer even than the lyrics. Here Isabella sits with her baby—there is the mother's place, round which they gather when anything has to be discussed in a family council. And a hundred words spoken here—a hundred little hourly cares and charities, make those walls and this roof-tree blessed.

In the meantime, after Esther has escaped to her room, Mrs. Melville in the nursery, over her grand-child's cradle, makes the great revelation to Isabella. Mrs. Melville has

been a whole month visiting Aunt Martha at Fernwood; it is wonderful how many changes are reported on little Isabella during those four weeks; but the young mother suspends her report, and becomes a most animated eager listener, as this story is told.

"Well, I was always quite sure—I told you so, mother—I told John only yesterday," exclaimed Isabella; "but I did fear there was somebody in Perthshire, when so long a time passed, and we heard nothing. Mother, when will it be?"

"Hugh's prospects must be more definite first, Isabella; it would be foolish to begin till he saw his way," said Mrs. Melville. "We could hardly persuade Esther to come with us, after that; but, I think, unless for a week or two, you should not let her go away again. Now go and speak to her,

Isabella; I shall be ready before she is, I fancy."

Mrs. Melville was very right. Isabella's entry into Esther's room by no means hastened the arrangement of the disorderly curls, and it was not till John had come repeatedly to drum at the door, and make pathetic remonstrances about the tea, for which Mrs. Melville and Hugh were waiting, that his wife led her cousin forth in triumph, holding her arm in her own.

They had a family council that night, clustering like children round Mrs. Melville's chair; but as this was all concerning those plans of Hugh's, which have been already mentioned, there was nothing new in it. Only Hugh began to "see his way," an important conclusion, and to think the home of which they speculated not so very far off, after all.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THIS, Esther, is to be the wedding-dress of little Tibs—I beg her pardon—this is Miss Aikman's wedding-dress."

"Oh, the robe? Is Mr. Aikman so hard upon you, Isabella? does he make you work?" said Esther. "It is very pretty: and our baby shall wear it, Sir, on her mamma's birthday."

"Very possibly," said John, "on her mamma's birthday twenty years hence. Yes, I can believe in that."

"Don't speak to him, Esther, don't make any impossible vow," said Isabella, hurrying forward as Esther was about to speak. "No, there is a great deal of work about it—see—and see—don't make any promises lest we should fail, and give him a lasting triumph."

"I promise that little Isabella shall wear the frock on big Isabella's birthday, that is all; aunt, you are my witness. I shall leave room for you, Isabella; this is my place here."

So saying, Esther lifted a chair to the other side of the work-table, and commenced operations.

"Will you walk down with me, Hugh? You must come to the office and see Wood," said John. "He has been asking very anxiously when we expected you. "Good-morning, ladies. Don't work too hard,

Esther. See, she is afraid; how her needle flies! and poor little Tibs will be cheated after all."

Bowing in answer to the little clenched hand, which Esther shook at him menacingly, John—who has considerably improved in his bow—left the room with a smile upon his face.

"Is Wood doing well, John?" asked Hugh, as they walked down the hill together.

"Very well; he has eighty pounds now—for you know I could not well make him my principal clerk, after what has happened; eighty pounds—perhaps you may think that too little, Hugh. My other man has a hundred and twenty; but I really cannot afford more. Wood, I think, has some special reason for desiring to see you now."

The rest of their conversation turned

upon business — upon Mr. Renshaw, Dr. Langstaff, and a host of others, unknown to fame—upon failures and successes, downfals and risings again. One of the failures was that of Mr. Goudie, Hugh's old *pseudo*-patron, who had lately come down with a great crash from his lofty altitude. He was an upright man, as blameless as he was solemn, not above the usual sins "in the way of business," indeed, but otherwise a strictly honourable and not ungenerous man. He had met with the greatest sympathy, and almost immediately after his failure had gone abroad. John Aikman was just concluding this story when they reached the office.

"Here is my brother, Wood—Dr. Melville, now," said John.

And Henry sprang from his office stool to meet his old benefactor. Henry—why, Henry

was actually growing stout, and looked as contented and satisfied as if he had been the greatest merchant in Liverpool. His face had a healthy tone, his brow was unruffled, his linen spotless. He had forgotten his shame, forgotten his sin; only one effect of them remained upon him, and that was a singular strength of disgust and recoil from the smaller vices which had at first ensnared him. This, which gave to his character what you might almost call a fictitious force of resistance, not naturally belonging to it, was the only vestige which remained of the once total shipwreck. Otherwise his heart—a simple, natural, childlike heart, had returned to its state of unblemished youth, and happily was able to forget.

"We are very comfortable. Mr. Aikman has been exceedingly liberal to me, and we are better than we ever were," said Wood,

"Mr. Melville, will you call on us? my mother and Helen are very anxious to thank you, and I have something to say—one other favour to ask."

As he said this, his eyes fell, and a shadow passed over his face.

"Very well, Wood; I must see my little patient—but Helen, bye the bye, will not choose to be called little now. Where do you live? when do you get home? I will call to-night if you like, for I may be occupied afterwards."

With thanks Henry gave him their address. It was the same street as Mrs. Melville had lived in, before Hugh went to College.

Leaving the office, Hugh strayed away by himself to the scene of his old labours. After a great change in one's life there is something curious—something often very melancholy—in passing over the old well-

known places, with which one has been familiar before; as you pass this and that point in the disused way, old thoughts stir and spring up within your breast. Into yonder house you once went with a heart, alas! so sick and heavy!—by yonder window you paused listlessly in the dreamy languor of grief. As you turn this corner, you remember how your pulses bounded on some happier occasion with the excitement of youthful joy, or how you grew breathless with very hope. Curiously Hugh looked up at Mr. Wardrop's office, glanced into the well-known shop of Mr. Primrose, paused at Mr. Goudie's stair; and, remembering all the past, went on his way thankfully, to the scene and theatre of another era in his life.

This street, which passes along by the high outer wall of the docks, is not a remark-

ably pleasant one, but it is singular and characteristic. The dock wall is very high, and under it lies a broad dusty pavement, where some applewomen, and one or two small travelling shops of "fancy" articles, brilliant lacquered boxes, pin-cushions, ornaments, and such like, which passing sailors may be tempted to buy as presents, take up their position. Every here and there the line is broken, where one great dock ends, and another begins; but on they stretch, mile upon mile, and looking in, you see an incoherent multitude of masts, defying all enumeration.

But it is the other side of the street which is most striking. Here is a high sharp brick gable, blazing with a great blue and white name "Sail-maker," and in the lower story hang life-buoys, and coils of rope twist themselves about the door. Then comes a

lower pile with some small shops of various kinds below, and another inscription, "Ship-bakery," blazoned on the corner. Then a small dingy warehouse-looking place —is it a warehouse?—not so; above the narrow door is a painted board, proclaiming this the "Bethel," the seaman's chapel, and telling the hours of worship. Next to it follows a smart plastered two-story erection carrying its name jauntily between its two rows of windows. It is American nine-pins or bowls, or some other such game, which is played within, and the word American stares you in the face in letters a foot long. Now another sailmaker's, now a great house, plastered all over with bills printed in red and blue ink, intimating when the A 1 ship, 'John Smith,' shall sail for Philadelphia, or the 'Argus,' for New York—an emigration office. Then a great public-house, where there are

concerts at night, of which the programme at present shines in the front. Then a handsomer shop than any of these, with little heaps of foreign money and notes in the window, and "Exchange Office" above the door; and then in much the same succession, shipbakery, emigration office, sailmakers, public-house, and shop of exchange, again and again.

This street is always crowded, and you can imagine the character of the crowd. Heavy waggons laden with cotton, with iron, with flour, keep up a perpetual din, and omnibuses so completely crowded with passengers, that they seem a moving mass of hats are constantly passing, drawn by miserable horses which a merciful man would grow sick to see. A quantity of wretched streets, send each its stream of poverty and pollution into the main thoroughfare. There

are perhaps in Liverpool places still more debased than this; there is none which can boast more of the *appearance* of evil.

Passing through this vociferous noisy way, Hugh at length reached the streets, in which he had made his first essay in his profession. The nearest one was that in which Dennis Kelly had lived, but Dennis Kelly had dropt out of the very remembrance of the dwellers there. Perhaps he lived still in some unwholesome room near at hand; perhaps he and all his half-famished brood had perished from the face of the earth. No one knew—no one had the slightest concern.

But the vivacious, dirty, kindly, widow Johnson, still held her place, and was the oracle of the court. Hugh found her with her characteristic shawl over her head, loud in a delightful piece of gossip. With a great "Eh, doctor!" she claimed his acquaintance,

and instantly entered on her own history. Her donkey and cart were prospering; her "boy" at the sugar-house had reached the glory of fifteen shillings a week, and was married.

Mrs. Johnston spoke of her daughter-in-law with a significant "my word! it's well to be her!" the poor girl had got a great match!

On his way home a very tall, handsome policeman touched his hat with a sheepish, good-humoured smile of recognition to Hugh. It was Angus Mackay; and no other trace could Hugh find, of his many patients, or of the fever.

In the evening, according to his promise, he went to call on Mrs. Wood. Her house was a little lower down in the street than Mrs. Melville's had been, and Hugh passed the door which had opened to him so often,

and looked in with a strange curiosity into the little parlour. There was a green Venetian blind at the window, and part of it had been opened, to make a little table, with a white knitted cover, on which lay a resplendent gilded Bible, visible from without. The poor little parlour was splendid and solemn now—a best room. Hugh smiled at himself for feeling annoyed at this as he went on.

"Do you think he will come to-night?—are you sure?—did he say he would come to-night?" asked Helen Wood.

Helen is seventeen now, and looks like her years; not so old nor so sadly wise as she did four years ago. Her cheeks are tinged with a little excitement, her serious blue eyes are bright with happy meaning. People say she is pretty sometimes, and are unanimous that at least she has a good face.

A good, intelligent, thoughtful face; but her mother, with an affectionate tremor, thinks it is a little too bright to-night.

"I think Mr. Melville will be married soon," said Henry.

Helen suddenly stood still, with parted lips, and a perfectly blank look. She did not say anything. She only looked from Henry to her mother as Mrs. Wood began to speak, and herself remained quite silent.

"To his cousin is it? that happy, lively Miss Greenlees. I am glad to hear it, Harry."

Quietly, and at once, Helen disappeared. She was a little shocked, poor child. Long cogitations over the possibility of doing anything to show her gratitude to Hugh, had carried her from the first childish ideas of knitting undreamt-of purses, and working Utopian slippers for him, to sundry vague dreams

of romance, natural to her years. Then he made an excellent ideal hero. She liked to think of him, to contrast him with the common working-day people. Poor little Helen stole away into her own room, and felt quite stunned and desolate for half an hour, and shed some tears which seemed to her bitter ones—which were in reality not bitter at all, nor salt with spray out of the great sea of sorrow, but only the peaceable dew-drops which fall out of the sky before the sun has risen.

Out of this sadness she emerged with a great resolution in her heart; it was to work something—a veil or an embroidered handkerchief, or something so delicate and beautiful as no one ever saw before—for Hugh Melville's bride. It seemed to Helen that there was something heroic in this, and it comforted her; while a few plaintive

words with which she resolved to present it, made her quite strong, and she descended again to wait with the rest for Hugh.

Hugh laid his hand on her shoulder with a brotherly kindness. Then he said gravely:

"You are still a little girl to me, Helen. You must remember, I have never seen you before, since you became a young lady."

"I am not a young lady—never to you, Mr. Melville," faltered poor little Helen.

But bye and bye, she found it was quite easy to talk to him, and not very difficult to think peaceably of Miss Greenlees. So Helen took her work into a corner, and in her mind invented magnificent patterns for the veil, while Henry with a grave face propounded to Dr. Melville the favour he had to ask.

"Do you recollect that night you came

to see us, four years ago," said Wood in a low voice, "when you found me half crazy with rage and shame, and my mother and Helen wretched about me? I believe every one of us could repeat to you the words you said then, Mr. Melville. You told me what I owed to *them*—my mother and the children. I have not rendered it all—no man ever could; but my mother is pleased with me, approves me now, and we are all happier than *I* ever hoped to be. Now there remains one thing—Mr. Renshaw."

Henry slightly turned away his head. That name had still power to bring a bitter blush to his face.

"Yes," said Hugh.

Out of a little book-case Wood produced a memorandum-book.

"I have saved the money, Mr. Melville—

thirty pounds—it is all safely lodged in the Savings' Bank. Perhaps I might have made it up sooner, but—"

Henry looked round upon the plain neat little room, and on the mother and sister, who sat sewing by the table.

"Yes, I understand; and I cannot see how you could have made it up earlier," said Hugh. "Well, Wood?"

"Well, Mr. Melville — Doctor — I beg your pardon—the old name we have spoken so long keeps its hold," said the young man. "I am not bold—I scarcely could venture to face Mr. Renshaw alone; this is my favour — will you go with me to pay this?"

"If you can—if you please, Mr. Melville," said Mrs. Wood, appealingly.

"Surely — surely; could you doubt I

should be glad to do it?" said Hugh. "When you please, Wood—my time is at my own disposal now. When will you go?"

"He gave notice to get the money out, as soon as we heard that you were coming, Dr. Melville," said the mother; "and he can get it to-morrow. Harry has never been able to rest since it was all saved; he has been so anxious! and now I am sure it will be a great load off his mind—a great satisfaction to us all."

"Then shall we arrange to go to-morrow?" said Hugh. "I must call on Mr. Renshaw on my own account. At what hour, Wood?"

"In the middle of the day—perhaps twelve o'clock—if you will be so good, Dr. Melville."

"This poor title of mine; it bothers you all," said Hugh, laughing. "Never mind the Doctor. To-morrow then at twelve."

CHAPTER XIX.

"How do you do, Mr. Melville? I am glad to see you," said Mr. Renshaw, advancing to meet Hugh as he entered the private room.

Behind Hugh stood Henry Wood, shrinking back with painful timidity, and with the deep, dull, painful red of his old sufferings covering his downcast face. Mr. Renshaw cast upon him a severe, cold look, and then went on, as though completely unconscious of his presence.

"When did you arrive? Is this merely a visit, or do you return to Liverpool permanently? How is Mr. Greenlees?"

"He has got a little heir to his great satisfaction: he is very well," said Hugh, smiling. Hugh did not desire to have any fictitious importance as "next of kin" to a childless nabob. "I have finished my education, Mr. Renshaw, and taken my degree. I think I shall most likely settle here if I can find an opening. At present, my friend has some little business with you, Sir if you are sufficiently disengaged."

"Oh, surely; at least if it is anything important, I can spare a few minutes," said Mr. Renshaw, drawing himself up, and taking out his watch.

Wood advanced a step, and then drew back. Face to face with the man whom he had once thought one of the greatest

of earthly potentates—face to face with the employer whom he had wronged—the young man trembled with shame, with anxiety, with the rising resistance of pride. Mr. Renshaw's severe glance fell on him once or twice, fell on him as the convicted culprit, the disgraced criminal—not the man who had again found health and hope.

He could not speak. A great sob struggled at his throat, his blood swelled to his face with such violence, that he felt as if the burning cheeks would burst. Poor fellow! the lofty judge before whom he stood, took no pity upon the passion which possessed him. Without a word to help out those struggling, swelling, desperate emotions, Mr. Renshaw, stood looking on.

"Mr. Renshaw," said Hugh, "my friend Wood wronged you once. We neither of us wish to deny or extenuate this; but it was

such wrong as a repentant man may render atonement for, and he has come to do so to-day."

"Indeed?" Mr. Renshaw began to look curious.

"My fault, my sin, my crime—call it what you will," exclaimed Wood hastily—"was a sin against you as much as against myself. I may never merit your forgiveness, Mr. Renshaw, but at least I hope that you will not refuse me the possibility of calling myself an honest man again. I see what you would say, Sir. No. I cannot be innocent. I must carry with me the conviction of this crime; but I may atone for it to my fellow-creatures as much as man can do."

It seemed an abrupt speech, but every vein was tingling and every limb trembled, as poor Henry delivered it. He had forgotten the misery attendant on crime for some

peaceful years bye-gone; this fiery trial was perhaps necessary at last.

Mr. Renshaw took the notes, and turned them over in his hand for a minute or two in silence. Then he spoke, still in frigid tones, but more kindly than before.

"Then there remains nothing between us to forgive. It is impossible, Mr. Wood, that I can speak of your past conduct with anything but the severest reprobation. I hope the future will take another colour, and am very glad to believe that you have an opportunity of redeeming yourself. I must also say that this is very creditable—exceedingly creditable to you, and your advisers—and that it is a great satisfaction to me, for your own sake, to be able to say that you are completely out of my debt. Good morning, I wish you well."

Henry bowed and turned away.

"Stay a minute, Mr. Melville; tell me what you intend to to do," said Mr. Renshaw, with an immediate change from judicial politeness to cordiality. "I have a few minutes to spare yet, pray stay."

"But I must first say a word to Wood," said Hugh, diving after him into the outer office. Henry was still very much agitated, but some of his old companions in the counting-house had gathered round him. Their memories were not so tenacious as Mr. Renshaw's; they were able to forget his crime, and did not think themselves called upon personally to execute vengeance.

Mr. Renshaw was still standing, looking at the notes with a dubious, perplexed face, when Hugh re-entered his room. He had never expected restitution; to depart from his first stern verdict of condemnation was embarrassing, and even the gentler thought of

Henry which stole over his mind, seemed something unorthodox, and almost immoral to the merchant. The young man had once been overcome by temptation: how then could a just man ever revoke his sentence of complete unworthiness?

"I shall send it to the infirmary, or to the charity-school, or to the soup-kitchen, Mr. Melville," said the rich man doubtfully.

It is so easy to be charitable; but it never occurred to Mr. Renshaw, that it might be added to the salary of poor Henry's successor in the office.

"I think you should found a College for Clerks, Mr. Renshaw," said Hugh.

"A College for Clerks? they serve us badly enough no doubt; but why, Mr. Melville?"

"I could recommend a course of study, I think," said Hugh. "They should be edu-

cated by some superhuman discipline of self-denial. To be very poor, yet always within reach of wealth; to have the sparest daily bread for themselves, and yet see thousands passing through their hands every day. I think an institution like this would be nearly as important as an infirmary."

"What do you mean, Mr. Melville?" asked Mr. Renshaw.

"I mean, Sir, that sometimes your great merchants, with no plea of poverty, do greater sin than poor Wood did; and that clerks, with such temptations, and such a prospect of continual poverty, should be trained to a grander code of morals, and by a severer discipline than common men. Ah, Mr. Renshaw, you do not know how hardly that money has been spared."

"How much has he now?" said Mr. Renshaw.

"My brother Aikman gives him eighty pounds, but he has only had that for one year," answered Hugh.

Perhaps there was some pride in Hugh's answer.

"Eighty pounds! Ah, these young men raise the prices of articles; yet I should have thought Aikman prudent. *I* couldn't afford that."

"How can a family live on less, I wonder," said Hugh.

"Ah, that is their concern! If they will marry, it is not my fault," said the merchant. "Now, Mr. Melville, my time is nearly up: I should like to hear what your own prospects are."

"To settle in Liverpool, if I can," said

Hugh quietly. "There may be difficulty perhaps, but I shall try."

"If I can be of any service to you, Mr. Melville," said Mr. Renshaw, "I hope you do not need to be told that I shall be glad to serve you."

Hugh bowed to the matter-of-course speech, which he knew very well meant nothing, and took his leave. Mr. Renshaw sent off the thirty pounds to the soup kitchen, and felt greatly comfortable—a conscientious, irreproachable man; but the thirty pounds of addition to his year's salary would have made the poor family father, who filled Henry Wood's old place, and who had toiled through all those years at the boy's wages of fifty pounds, a happy man. Mr. Renshaw never thought of that; it was a minute object only to be seen by the microscopic eye of

justice. Mr. Renshaw's vision took a wider range and missed it.

A few weeks passed, full of exertion, of hope, of genial family intercourse. The baby's robe made splendid progress; and as they sat together in the bow-window, working as of old, Isabella and Esther almost forgot those four intervening years. It was an easier matter this with Esther than Isabella, for a certain little voice from the nursery had a great tendency to disperse the illusion with the young mother; babies being events which people cannot conveniently forget.

"Mr. Aikman, where is your daughter's bridegroom? the bride is ready," said Esther, springing to meet him with the child in her arms. "See, it is big Isabella's birthday, and here is little Isabella in her wedding-dress."

"Ah, that is only because you have been working night and day," said John receiving the baby and throwing it up in his strong arms; "besides, it was not your industry I questioned, only Tibbie's yonder. *She* would not have finished it in as many years. Speaking about bridegrooms, Esther, if I cannot present to you the bridegroom of my little Tibs, you shall hear of another one more to the purpose, if you behave prettily. Isabella, come here. Where do you think I left Hugh?"

"How can I tell, John? consulting with some surgeon who is giving up business, I suppose," said Isabella, while Esther's cheek flushed, and she turned her eager face away; "but then it turns out so universally, that the business has first given up the surgeon. John, the child!—you are sure to hurt her if you throw her about so."

"She is inclined herself to—an opposite opinion," said John, growing red with his exertions. "Clap your hands, small Isabella, and hurrah for your uncle."

"What is it about Hugh?" said Mrs. Melville anxiously.

"It is—it is—I left him in Dr. Langstaffe's, ladies, arranging preliminaries for a partnership."

"John!" exclaimed Isabella.

But Esther did not exclaim; she only turned away a little further, and opened her lips to relieve her quick breathing, and said "Oh!" under her breath.

"Perhaps assistantship would be a better word, at first," said John; "but I think they will get on capitally together, and Hugh is sure to rise. Dr. Langstaffe's practice is peculiar; he deals only with one class of diseases — almost only — and has patients

coming to him from all quarters round about; so that the general practice falls to his assistant, who, of course, is set up and established at once. No need for the long probation, and slow progress we anticipated; no time for the essays on things in general. He sent me off to tell you—are you pleased, our mother?"

Pleased! Mrs. Melville's cheeks were wet, she could not speak at the moment.

And John did not exaggerate. In a very short time, Dr. Hugh had entered upon the large practice, which the name of his principal secured for him, and which his own name soon confirmed. Very closely following upon this came an event, in preparation for which Mr. Greenlees of Greenlees, moved by a consideration of the prospective prosperity of

his nephew, bestowed upon his daughter a portion; not a very great one, only two hundred pounds, but it served its purpose. It was given with an assurance that nothing more was to be expected.

"But they have no heir at Greenlees, and no word of one, Esther," said Aunt Martha in a consolatory tone, as she presented to her niece the bridal dress.

And with a natural satisfaction, in which some pride for her old self, and tender, mournful exultation over the dead husband, whose son had done so much honour to his name, blended unwittingly, Mrs. Melville looked on, more firmly than at the last ceremony of the kind, as her niece Esther, another daughter of Greenlees, put aside the paternal name, and in her white dress and with her pure heart, passed

away, out of the gates of Fernwood, a Greenlees no longer, but now one of the Melvilles.

THE END.

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